

Workshop teaches homeowners to prepare for wildfire

Marian Liddell

Before the roar of burning tops assaults the ears and the sting of embers burns the skin, think, "What I do to save myself, my family and my home?" Due to early warm weather throughout Plumas County residents are lighting their burn piles and everyone should be aware of the early wildfire season and the threat of wildland fires.

A Firewise Workshop was held on March 31 at the Lake Almanor Peninsula fire station. Targeted Lake Almanor Basin and Indian Valley community members included local firefighters, land developers, insurance agents, the media and

communities continue to be built countywide within or near wildlands.

Many Plumas County residents have experienced threats from wildland fires in the past: the Willow Fire in 1987, the Portola Fire in 1988, the Layman Fire in 1989, the Greenhorn Fire in 1990, the Cemetery Fire in 1999, the Mt. Hough Complex Fires in 1999, the Horton Fire in 1999, the Storrie Fire in 2000 and the Stream Fire in 2001.

Little things, big impacts
Is it time for the next fire? Are we overdue? Has our luck run out?

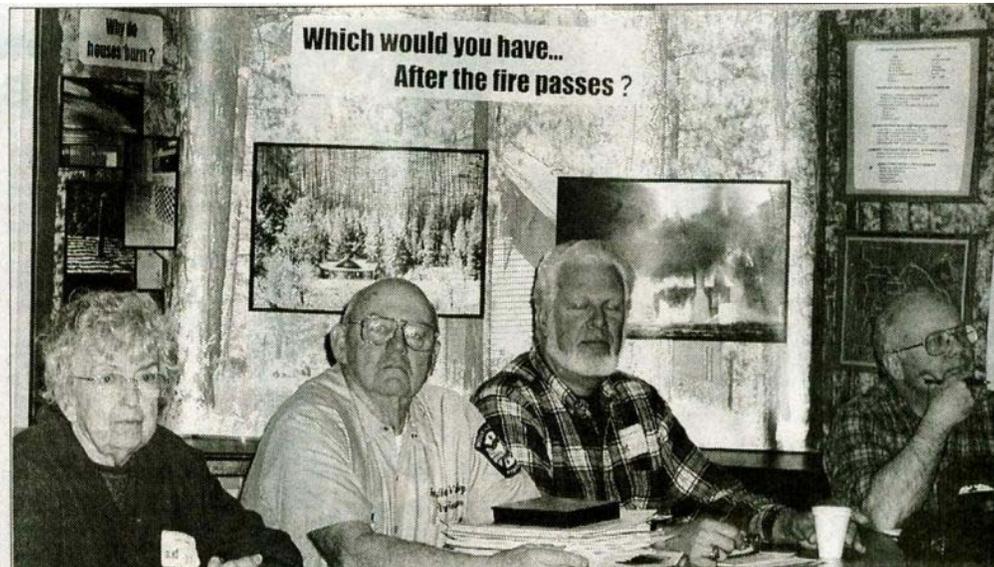
At the workshop, Plumas

embers ... not always the wall of flames. Homes can and do survive wildfires."

Through state-of-the-art computer and film simulations, mapping exercises and role-playing, local representatives at the March workshop saw that:

Adequate exit and entrance pathways for homeowners and firefighters can save lives, homes, cars and sometimes the economy of a community.

- Removing brush and trees 100 to 300 feet from a building can keep a wildfire from making a visit. According to research, 60 feet of "defensible space" raises survival rates to 95 percent.
- Homes built on slopes greater than 40 percent will be difficult to defend during a fire. Firefighters may not even try to save these homes.
- Wood roofs are a wildfire's best chance of survival. In comparison, a thick layer of burning pine needles on a fire resistant roof only causes a smoke problem. Almanor West Fire Chief Mark Reno said, "The biggest threat to our communities is shake roofs. A shake roof can suck in all available resources, so we can't go and fight the fire."
- Underground utility lines and tanks don't burn or explode.



Photos by Marian Liddell
Taking part in a Firewise Workshop are, from left: Indian Valley Community Services District representative Nancy Lund, Indian Valley Fire and Rescue Representative Jim Hamlin, professional forester Keith Crummer and Almanor Fire Safe Council coordinator Dale Knutsen.

many others who will move into action when wildfires arrive.

This Firewise Workshop was part of a nationwide effort to share what has been learned about the "wild-land/urban interface" since 1985, when 1,400 homes were lost to wildfire.

This kind of event could happen in Plumas County as

County Supervisor Bill Dennison said, "Our Fire Safe Councils have become more effective than many, because of member knowledge of the importance to look beyond the perimeter of a house in securing a fire-safe community." Plumas County Fire Safe Council representative Jerry Hurley said, "It's the little things ... the

- A clean yard and roof is a good defense plan against a wildfire.
- Everyone knows wood will burn.

The Firewise Communities Workshop was sponsored by the University of California Cooperative Extension and led by Natural Resources Advisor Mike De Lasaux and his assistant, Josh Davies, who is a 1998 graduate of Chester High School.

The one-day workshop was possible because of a grant, part of the next National Fire Plan, from the Bureau of Land Management.

De Lasaux said, there's a lot of work to do to get architects, landscapers and homeowners to be part of the Fire-wise process. Hurley said, "We move here for the forests. Then we ask for protection. Homeowners need to understand how to protect themselves. County supervisors and home owners' associations can clamp down on shake roofs."

John Sheehan, from Plumas Corp said, Quincy mandates woodstove change outs prior to the sale of homes. They can do the same for shake roofs."

Stating that fire districts cannot mandate their own ordinances, Chester Fire District board president Dave Merrifield said, "The timing may be right for (these) options and benefits including county subsidized insurance reductions. But we need community wide support."

Dale Knutsen from the Almanor Fire Safe Council said, "There's also the insurance companies' growing role in mandating changes.

It's just a matter of time before homeowners are faced with this.

They can ignore planners, fire districts, etc., but insurance companies will have the financial hammer."

For more information on this program and other local, state and federal Firewise plans contact either Mike DeLasaux at 283-6125 or Almanor Fire Safe Council representative Dale Knutsen at 259-2287. Or, visit the Plumas County Fire Safe Council's Web site at plumasfiresafe.org

