

New County Booklet Should Be Required Reading for Every Malibuite

A booklet every Malibu resident will want to read has just been published by the county fire department and forestry division and deals with preparing for, and fighting, wildfires and floods.

The 33-page booklet containing several color pictures and easy-to-read text, is entitled, "A Homeowner's Guide to Fire and Watershed Management at the Chaparral/Urban Interface."

Don't let the title deter you, the contents are worth exploring since the booklet talks in mostly everyday language about the two problems that forever plague Malibuites: fire and flood.

The booklet was written by Klaus W.H. Radtke, a wildland resource scientist, who is a senior deputy forester. The booklet is free, and is expected to be distributed by Supervisor Deane Dana's Malibu field office to local fire stations and through other public outlets. For further information, call Dana's office at 456-3381.

To be sure, there have been several guides and booklets written to help the homeowner deal with wildfires and floods, but Radtke says in the introduction that "until now, however, none has given the homeowners comprehensive advice on managing his property effectively so as to reduce the chance of wildfire and mudflow disasters and the hardships, both personal and financial, they bring.

"This booklet attempts to provide such advice in a practical, nonscientific, yet professional manner, through basic principles and guidelines."

The booklet declares the author, incorporates "state-of-the-art knowledge in various wildland disciplines, and the experience gained by the author in dealing with fire and floods in his work and as a homeowner at the chaparral boundary.

"The booklet first provides a brief description of the chaparral plant community, followed by sections describing some basic considerations of watershed and fire management. Later sections deal with improving safety around the home through home design, landscaping, and maintenance; protecting oneself and one's property during a wildfire; and, finally, providing emergency treatment of hillsides after a fire."

For residents planning on building here, there is a section on building design dealing with safety considerations in repelling a wildfire.

"The roof is the most vulnerable part of a home, because it is exposed to airborne sparks," says Radtke. "The wood shingle roof has been the single most important element in home losses during wildland fires. It is also a major source of airborne firebrands capable of igniting nearby structures. Studies of structural losses during wild-

fire in Southern California have shown that with 100 feet of brush clearance, a home with a wooden roof has a 21 times greater chance of burning than a home with a nonwood roof..."

Also discussed is the location of the home since this affects its likelihood of burning.

Maximum utilization of home pools is discussed since a pool can be an important firefighting source.

Included are charts which analyze wind-driven fire paths and topography. What to plant on slopes to stabilize them and retard wildfire also is analyzed.

One of the most important sections of the book deals with "what to do when caught in a wildfire."

Some 13 steps are discussed on preparations to make before the fire approaches, covering evacuation, what to wear, preparing the house and the surrounding area.

1. If you plan to stay, evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to protecting the home.
2. Be properly dressed to survive the fire. Cotton fabrics are preferable to synthetics. Wear long pants and boots and carry with you for protection a long-sleeved shirt or jacket, gloves, a handkerchief to shield the face, water to wet it, and goggles.
3. Remove combustible items from around the house this includes lawn and

poolside furniture, umbrellas and tarp coverings. If they catch fire, the added heat could ignite your house.

4. Close outside attic, eave and basement vents. This will eliminate the possibility of sparks blowing into hidden areas within the house. Close window shutters.

5. Place large plastic trash cans or buckets around the outside of the house and fill them with water. Soak burlap sacks, small rugs, large rags. They can be helpful in beating out burning embers or small fires. Inside the house, fill bathtubs, sinks and other containers with water. Toilet tanks and water heaters are an important water reservoir.

6. Locate garden-hoses so they will reach any place on the house. Use the spray-gun type nozzle, adjusted to a spray.

7. If you have portable gasoline-powered pumps to take water from a swimming pool or tank, make sure they are operating and in place.

8. Place a ladder against the roof of the house opposite the side of the approaching fire. If you have a combustible roof, wet it

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down or turn on any roof sprinklers. Turn on any special fire sprinklers installed to add protection. Do not waste water. Waste can drain the entire water system quickly.

9. Back your car in the garage and roll up the car windows. Disconnect the automatic garage door opener (in case of power failure you could not remove the car). Close all garage doors.

10. Place valuable papers and momentos inside the car in the garage for quick departure, if necessary. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

11. Close windows and doors to the house to prevent sparks from blowing inside. Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace to help stabilize outside-inside pressure, but close the fireplace screen so sparks will not ignite the room. Turn on a light in each room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.

12. Turn off pilot lights.

13. If you have time, take down your drapes and curtains. Close all venetian blinds or noncombustible

window coverings to reduce the amount of heat radiating into your home. This gives added safety in case the windows give way because of heat or wind.

As the firefront approaches, go inside the house. Stay calm, you are in control of the situation.

After the fire passes, check the roof immediately. Extinguish any sparks or embers. Then, check inside the attic for hidden burning sparks. If you have a fire, get your neighbors to help fight it. The water in your pool and the water in your garbage cans, sinks, toilet tanks, etc., will come in handy now. For several hours after the fire, recheck for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

Perhaps the most important advice in this section is: "Stay calm, you are in control."

Supervisor Deane Dana's office is working on distributing copies of the Radtke booklet in brushfire and slide prone areas.

For further information on immediate availability, contact Dana's Malibu field deputy, Peter Ireland, at 456-3381.