

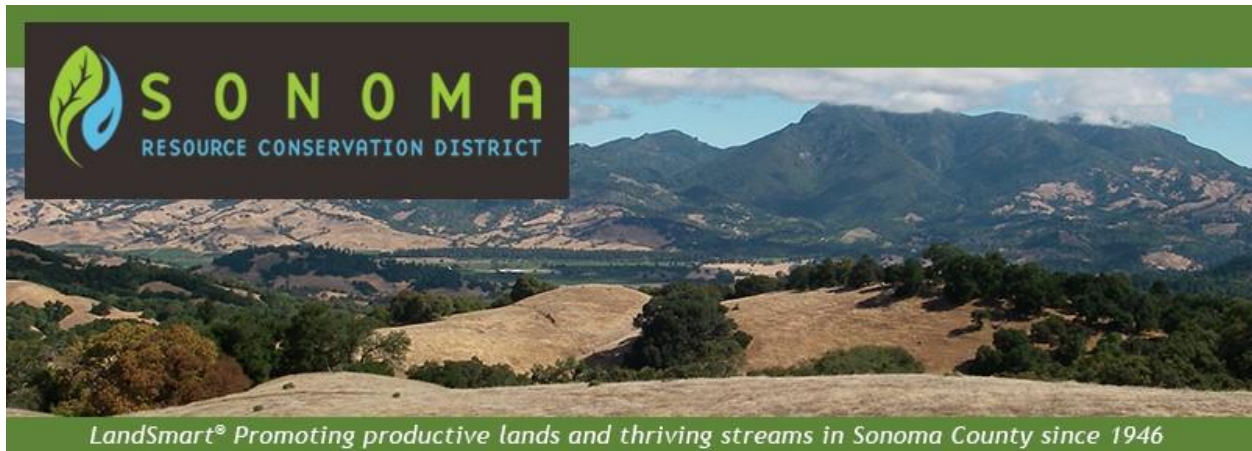
## **Put It in Action: Fire Safety on Your Property**

We all know the danger is real. But has each of us taken the time to prepare? Without a doubt, preparing your property, your community and your daily operations for fire safety is a complex task. But there is no greater reward for all of your hard work should your farm and home be spared from a wildfire. In this fourth year of drought, the 2016 fire season forecast is high in our region, particularly after spring-time rain established denser vegetation growth (“fuel bed”) than in previous drought years.

### **Reducing Fuel: Your Property from a Fire’s Point of View**

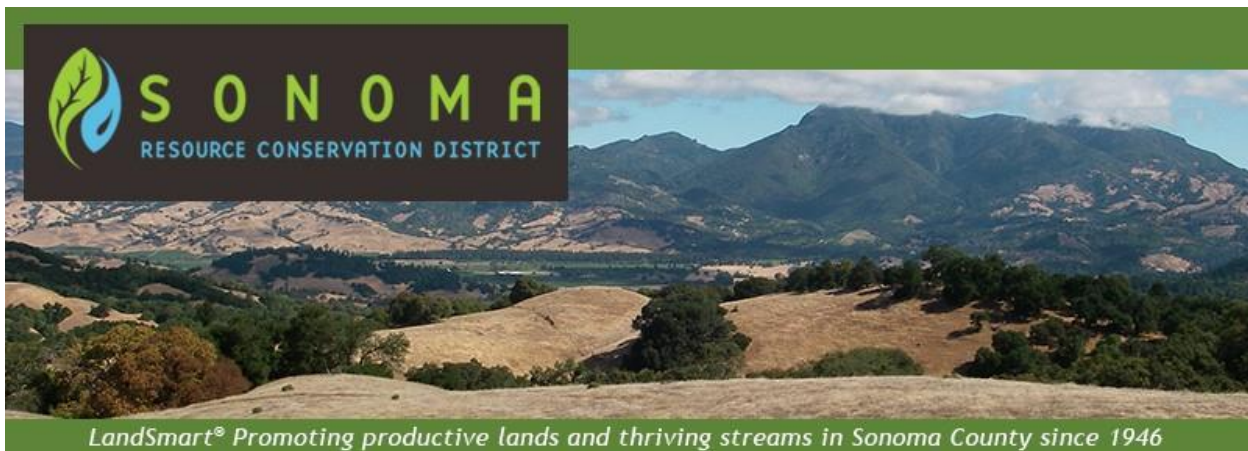
Walk your property and imagine how a spark might start or how fire could be fueled. In rural homes, fires most typically ignite in and around heating elements; in barns the major cause is damaged electrical equipment. If you have chemicals, fuels and fertilizer stored next to each other, you’ve got a recipe for disaster. If you have exposed wiring, lightbulbs, heat sources, oily rags, or use extension cords in your barn or shed, these can ignite a fire. Similarly, if a fire starts, piles of feed, hay, straw or wood pallets are piles of fuel for a fire. Aim to reduce the number of sparks and the proximity of fuels. Store flammable liquids in fire-safe containers; move feed and hay out of the main barn; clean, repair and cover exposed electrical elements. Make these tasks part of your operation’s routine.

Your fields, landscaping and wooded areas also need examining. Fires climb fuel “ladders” and hop across fuel “patches,” so maintaining vertical and horizontal clearance between vegetation is essential. Vertically, six feet is the minimum clearance your trees should have between their lowest limbs and the ground. If there are shrubs under the tree, then the clearance between the top of the shrub and the tree’s lowest branches should be 3x the height of the shrub. Horizontally, aim to maintain 10 feet between trees and two feet between shrubs, providing even more space on slopes and hillsides. After clearing woody debris, chip the wood and lay the chips down as a fire-resistant mulch. Many equipment rental businesses rent wood chippers, and the County of Sonoma offers curbside chipping service to small parcel owners. Dry vegetation (e.g. sticks, pine needles) is literally tinder, so remove any dry or dead matter from the ground, hanging in trees, or on or near buildings (e.g. in gutters and between deck slats) during fire season. Fields of annual grass should be kept low



(maximum four inches tall), and mowing should happen early in the day when it is cooler, and not at all on windy or very dry days. Vegetation near creeks and waterways can be thinned or laddering fuels but not cleared, as it can cause erosion and ecosystem damage.

Finally, the adage that your home needs 100 feet of defensible space is absolutely true. Your home, your barn, your operation's main office all need a special level of protection to keep a hungry fire at a distance. Cal-FIRE's website has extensive tips on fire-proofing the area immediately around your buildings and access [ways. www.readyforwildfire.org](http://www.readyforwildfire.org).



### **Maintaining Access: Your Property from a Firefighter's Point of View**

Once you have reduced the fuels across your property, consider the path your team and first responders will take to escape and extinguish an approaching blaze. Important questions to ask yourself are: Do you have a warning system to alert your team of a fire, such as a bell or a siren? Have you trained your team in a fire-drill? How far are you from your first responder, and how long will it take for them to arrive? Can the fire truck easily drive around all main structures on the property? Do you have a water tank or pond to tap into? Do you have a pump that is regularly tested either at the pond or that can be carried to the pond to draft water? Does your community have a number of tanks or ponds within its 5-mile radius to effectively extinguish a fast-moving fire? Do you have a map of all access routes and water sources on the property posted for your team and fire responder to see? Does your neighbor's property put you and your fire responder at risk, and can you work with them to make your neighborhood safer? Once again, Cal-FIRE has excellent resources on planning evacuations, talking to your first responders, buying emergency kits, and more.

### **Financial Assistance for Producers in Fire Prone Areas**

There are many sources of funding available to help agricultural operations before, during and after natural disasters. State and national funds are allocated for helping producers reduce the threat of wildfire, evacuate loved ones and property during an impending emergency and rehabilitate damaged properties and crops after the event. A few sources of support are: **the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, Emergency Farm Loans, Emergency Watershed Protection Program, Tree Assistance Program, Livestock Indemnity Program, Emergency Conservation Program.** These programs are mostly managed by the USDA's Farm Assistance Program and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

### **Putting It in Action**



Taking action on fire safety is everyone's responsibility for the welfare of people, place and economy. It's also an opportunity to protect more than your own property. Wildfires like the 2015 Valley Fire in Lake and Napa Counties spread fast and furious because of drought, dead trees and dry vegetation. With good management, your property can provide a fuel break for your community in a time of true emergency.

***More resources for landowners and communities:***

*A landowner resource guide:*

*[http://www.firesafesonoma.org/main/sites/default/files/living\\_with\\_fire.pdf](http://www.firesafesonoma.org/main/sites/default/files/living_with_fire.pdf)*

*Help for Communities planning fire safety: <http://firewise.org/>*