

Addressing Wildfire in the Built Environment



An introduction to NFPA's Firewise USA® Program

Megan Fitzgerald-McGowan | Summer 2025



About the National Fire Protection Association

Global, self-funded non-profit devoted to eliminating death, injury, property and economic loss due to fire, electrical and related hazards.

- Support for development, adoption, and enforcement of codes and standards
- Research and data analysis
- Technical training and certification
- Public education
- Outreach and advocacy

FAST FACTS

- Founded in 1896
- More than 40,000 members
- 6,000 volunteers
- 275+ technical code development committees
- 300 codes and standards
- 300 employees



NFPA and Wildfire

- Structures and residents are at risk to fire anywhere.
- NFPA's vision focuses on life safety and property-loss elimination.
- Engaged in WUI risk reduction since U.S. wildfire season of 1985.

Fire Protection and Prevention for Summer Homes in Forested Areas

Prepared by the Forest Committee
of the National Fire Protection Association
Adopted 1935

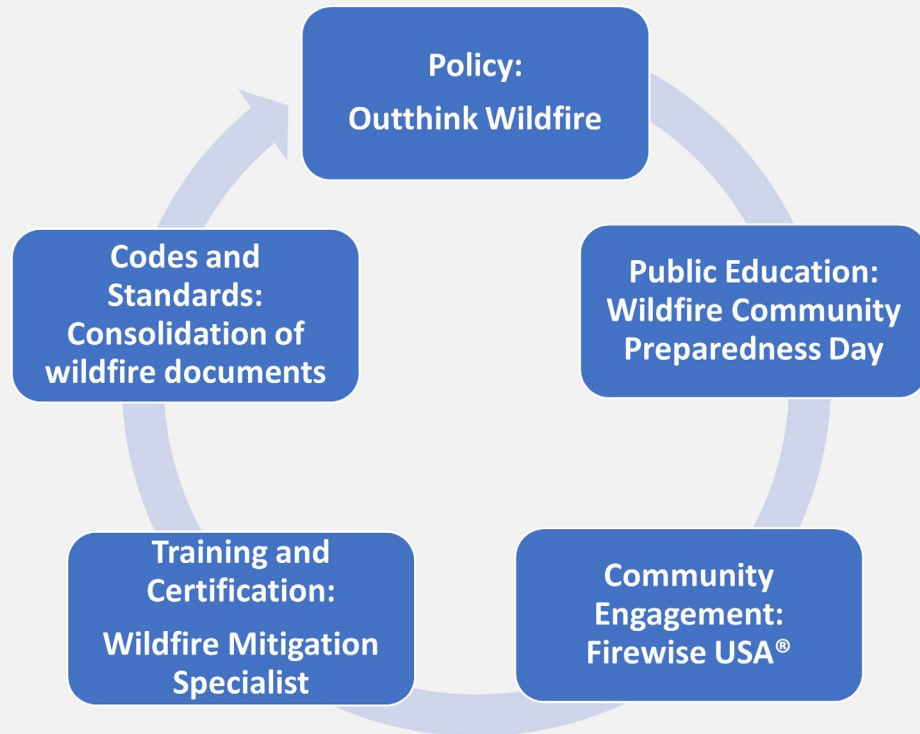
Price: Ten Cents

National Fire Protection Association
International
60 Batterymarch Street
Boston, Mass., U.S.A.





NFPA Wildfire Safety Work



NFPA.ORG

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FOUNDATION FOR ACTION



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The Firewise Vision

Wildland fires can occur in areas of residential development without the occurrence of disastrous loss.

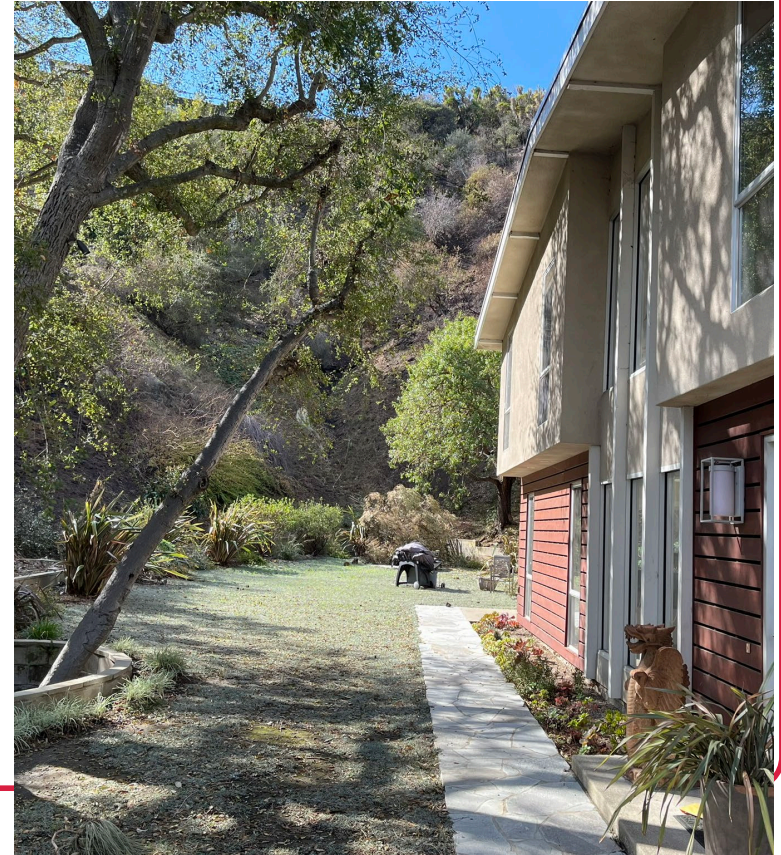
In fact, a house and its surrounding community can be compatible with the area's ecosystem



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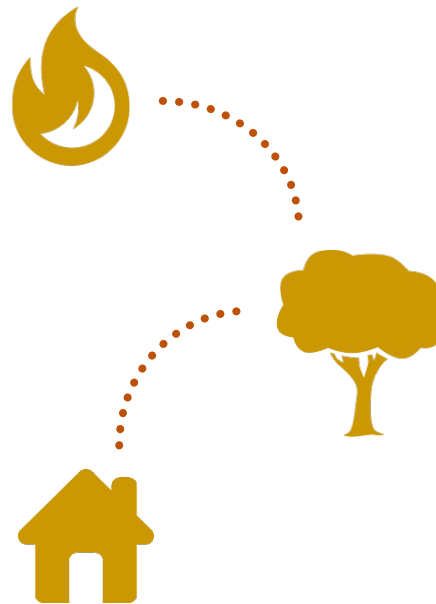
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Palisades Fire – home survival



What does the science say?

- Research by Dr. Jack Cohen (USFS, retired)
 - Fire does not engulf everything in its path
 - Fire only advances to locations that meet requirements of combustion
 - Altering the type, size, quantity, and spacing of vegetation and other fuels will reduce likelihood of combustion
- Research by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (embers)
 - <https://ibhs.org/risk-research/wildfire/>





Home Ignition Zone

Science based recommendations for individual homes

Home Ignition Zone – home and 0-100 feet from the base of a building or furthest attachment (e.g., deck)

- Choosing fire-resistant building materials and construction techniques
- Limiting the amount of flammable vegetation
- Periodic exterior maintenance



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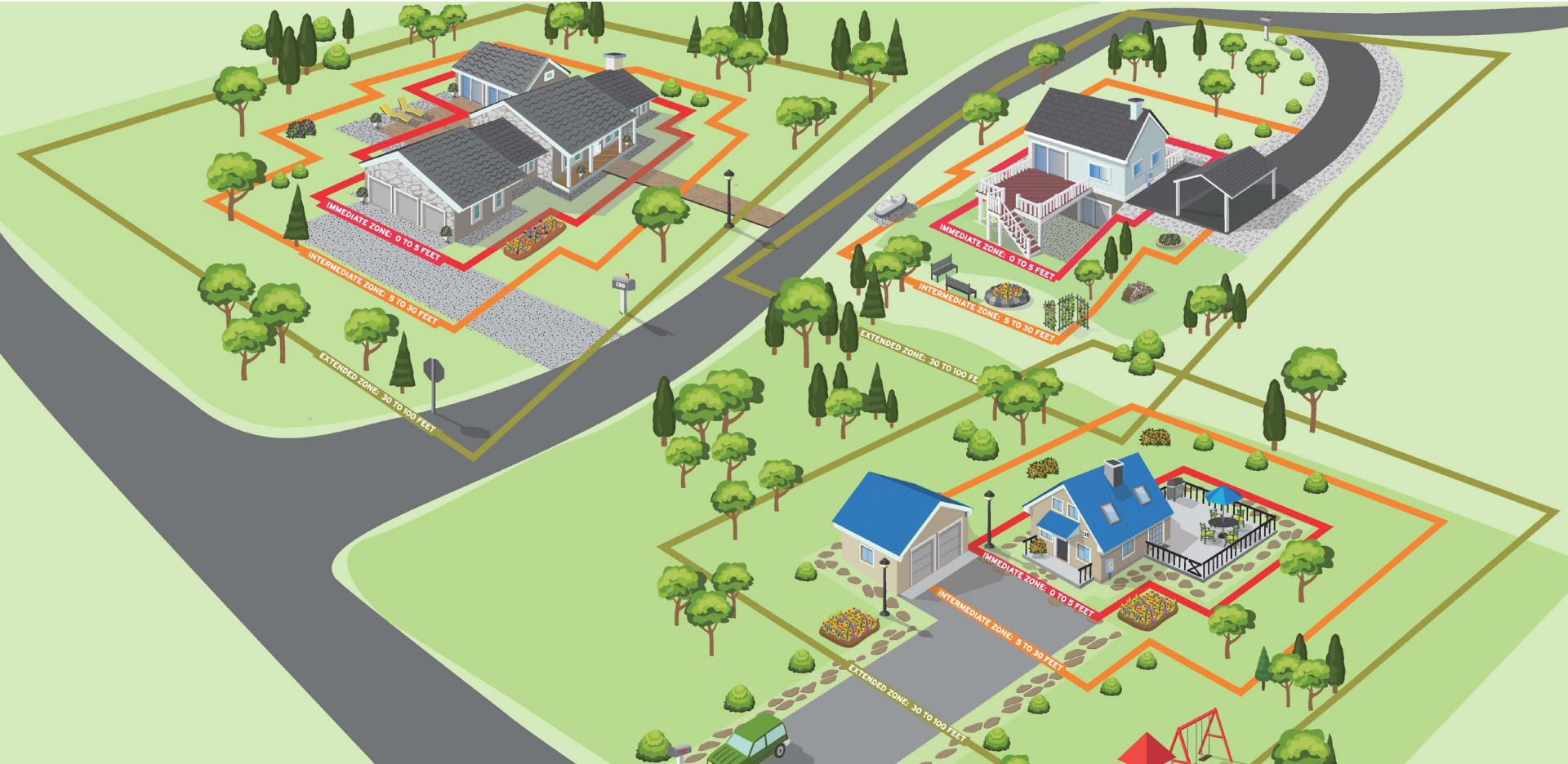
Areas for improvement

- Vegetation to the side is continuous, no spacing
- Vegetation is not maintained – mowing, trimming, cleaning up debris
- Impact to home behind? Within the HIZ of at least 2 homes

Strengths

- Spacing between plants
- Rock mulch close to the house and further out
- Paved walkway and driveway to break up vegetation





Creating an ignition-resistant community



FIREWISE USA®

RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

A recognition program that provides a framework to help residents get organized, find direction, and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community.



Fire Adapted Communities



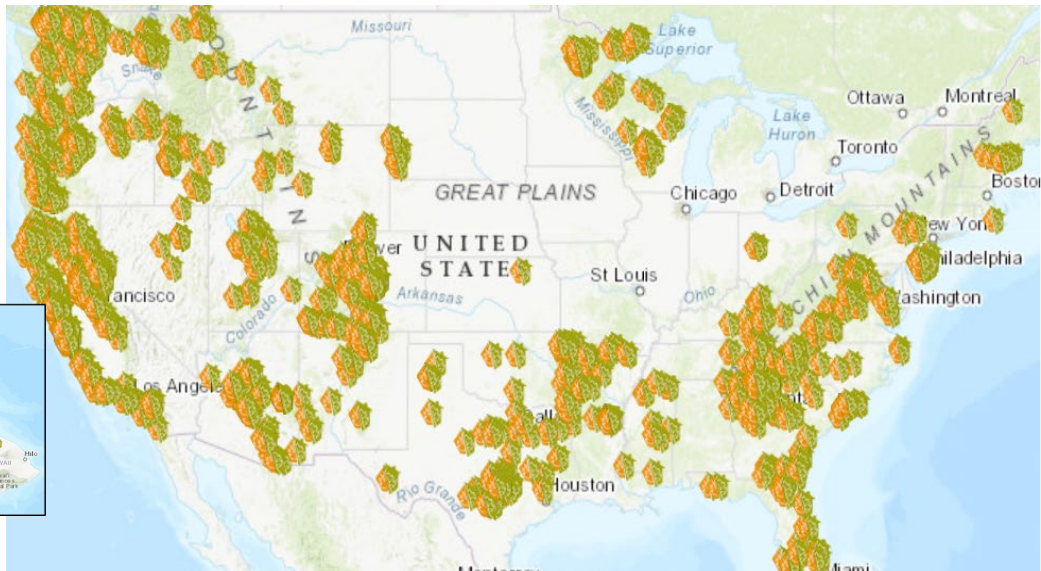
- Firewise USA is a tool for wildfire adaptation
- Community (self-defined) level
- Every community's needs are different



FIREWISE USA®

RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

Fast Facts

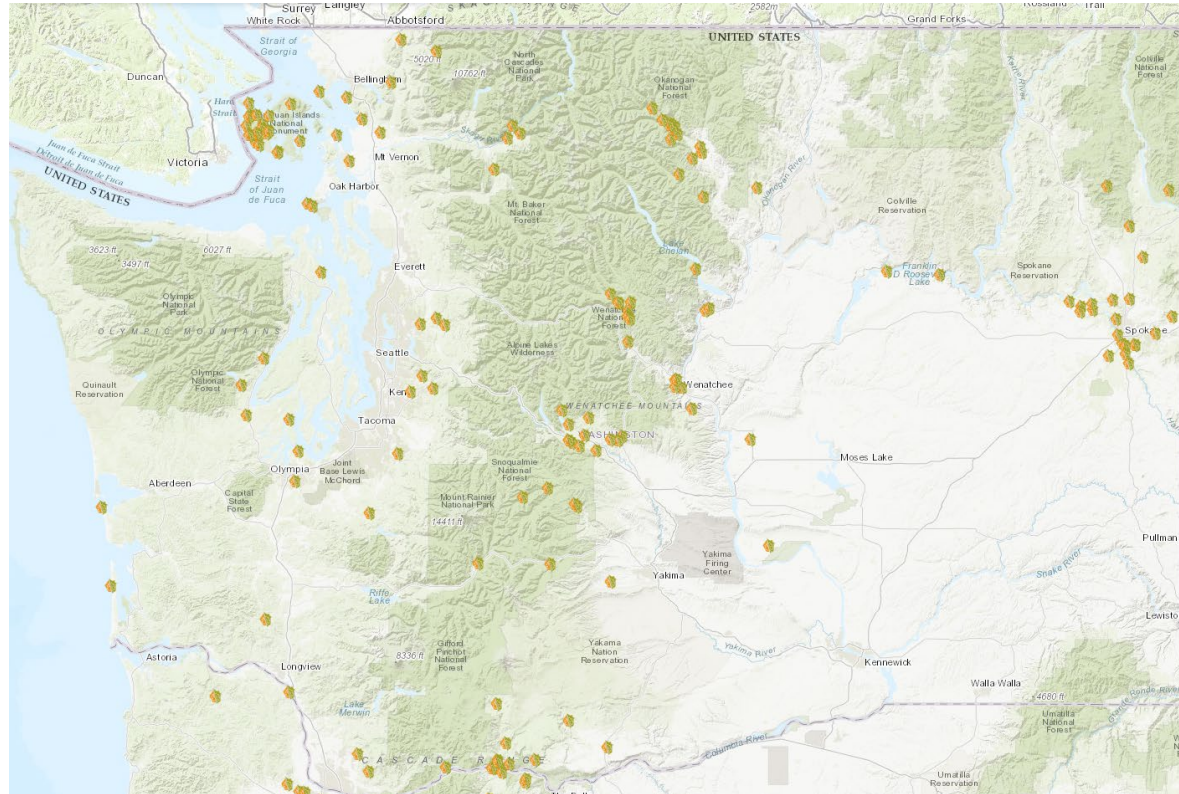


- Established in 2002
- 12 original pilot sites, 9 are still active
- Available in all US states and territories
- Administered by NFPA with support from USDA Forest Service and State Forestry agencies
- Addresses risk of home destruction from wildfire
- Engages property owners in safety action

2,900+ Sites in 36 States



Washington Participation



- 144 Firewise USA sites in good standing
- River Bluff Ranch in Spokane among 2002 original sites



FIREWISE USA®

RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

Why do communities participate in Firewise USA?

- Wildland fires can occur in areas of residential development without the occurrence of disastrous loss.
- A house and its surrounding community can be compatible with the area's ecosystem
- Encourages neighbors to work together to decrease risk for residents and first responders



www.Firewise.org

Community/Grass
Roots

Individuals/communities

Local practitioners

Local state
or federal
office

Fire
Department

Fire Safe
Councils

Other SMEs

State Liaison

Washington State Department of
Natural Resources

National program

NFPA



Steps to Achieving National Recognition

Visit www.firewise.org and click on **Get Started**

GET ORGANIZED

Form a board/committee comprised of residents and other wildfire stakeholders.

Obtain a wildfire risk assessment.

Determine the size and boundary: minimum 8 and maximum 2,500 dwelling units.

MAKE A PLAN

Create a 3-year action plan that identifies community education and risk reduction actions.

DO THE WORK

Host a minimum of one wildfire risk reduction educational outreach event.

Meet the minimum wildfire risk reduction investment.

TELL US ABOUT IT

Create a Firewise USA® Portal account and submit an application to your state Firewise USA liaison.

2025 Firewise USA Application

Canoa Ridge HOA

Step: 9 of 9

✓ Review



Details

- ✓ Overview
- ✓ State Requirements
- ✓ Risk Assessment
- ✓ Board/Committee
- ✓ Action Plan
- ✓ Educational Outreach
- ✓ Vegetation Removal
- ✓ Risk Reduction Investment
- ✓ **Review**



Firewise USA® recognition

- Community can request up to 2 signs
- Name of community appears on national website
- Public map is updated 3x annually



Steps to Maintaining National Recognition

To remain “In Good Standing,” Firewise sites must submit an annual renewal application. Due in mid-November, can be worked on throughout the year.

BE ORGANIZED

Committee oversees outreach and mitigation efforts

Verify risk assessment is current, update if prompted by the portal (every 5 years, due date shown on dashboard)

Update community details if expanding or shrinking boundary, submit a new map

REVIEW PLAN

Verify action plan is still current, update if prompted by the portal (every 3 years, due date shown on community dashboard)

DO THE WORK

Host a minimum of one wildfire risk reduction educational outreach event.

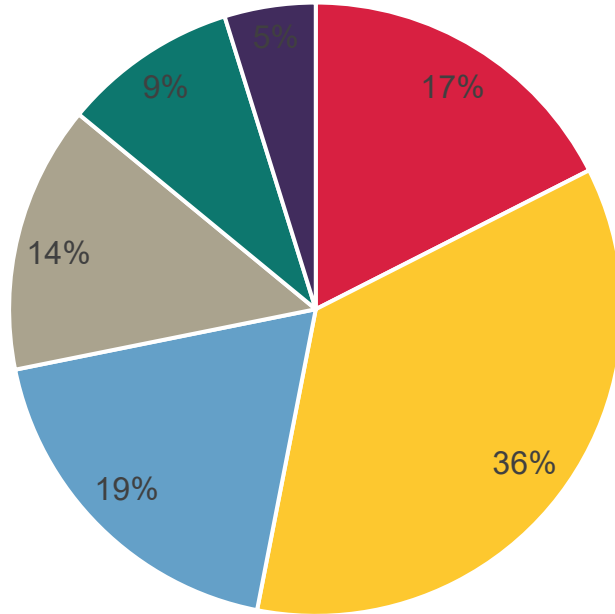
Meet the minimum wildfire risk reduction investment.

TELL US ABOUT IT

Login to the Firewise Portal to complete your renewal application and make community updates

Firewise USA Retention Over the Years

Participation Data as of January 2025

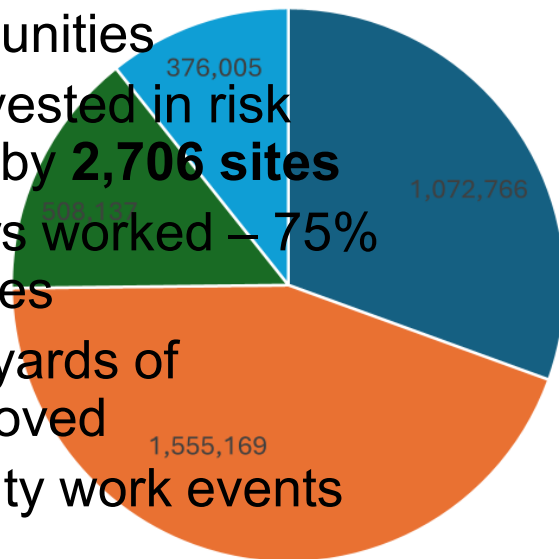


■ New in 2024 ■ 1-4 years ■ 5-9 years
■ 10-14 years ■ 15-20 years ■ 20+ years

- 14 percent of communities have been engaged for 15 or more years
- 33 percent have been engaged between 5 and 14 years
- 2023 to 2024 had a 99% retention rate

2024 Firewise USA Site Total Hours of Mitigation by Type

- 474 new communities
- \$293 million invested in risk reduction work by **2,706 sites**
- 3.5 million hours worked – 75% on/around homes
- 7 million cubic yards of vegetation removed
- 3,986 community work events documented



- **75% of the reported hours represent work within the Home Ignition Zone**
- **People devoted a total of 3,512,077 hours to wildfire risk reduction – average of 1,296 hours per site**

■ Dwelling Unit ■ 0-100 Feet Landscaping ■ Common Areas ■ Other

Sites of Excellence Report

The goals:

- 100% participation of homes within the designated pilot boundary (self-identified up to 100 co-located homes).
- Complete identified mitigation tasks within 30 feet of every home, based on recommendations from individual assessments

What leads to success:

- Neighbor to neighbor communication
- Build community cohesion
- Coordination with local and state governments
- Remain committed despite setbacks



FIREWISE USA®
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS



Residents Reducing
Wildfire Risks: Findings from
the NFPA® Firewise® Sites of
Excellence Pilot, 2019–2020

Rebecca Miller, PhD
Postdoctoral Scholar, West on Fire Project
University of Southern California
May 2022

**WHAT ABOUT IHBS WILDFIRE PREPARED
PROGRAMS?**

Firewise USA and Wildfire Prepared Home

Strength in numbers

- Both program are working to decrease loss from conflagrations
- Same science foundation, however, IBHS requires homes to meet all requirements before designation
- The more homes meeting that higher standard in a Firewise USA site, the more we bend down the risk

NFPA & IBHS MOU

- Alignment of messaging
- Development of co-branded resources promoting home improvements and the community-based space
- IBHS community-based designation built off Wildfire Prepared Home and Firewise USA
 - More rigorous
 - Opportunity for Firewise sites who are ready for next level
 - Objective, measurable way to look at mitigation across parcels

Insurance and Incentives

- Reminder: As a whole, NFPA is not sponsored or funded by the insurance industry. We have specific efforts where we work together
- Firewise USA was not developed for insurance purposes
 - Included in CDI Safer From Wildfires regulation
 - To meet demand for address verification working with data companies that service the industry
 - Data updated twice a year, exploring capacity to deliver more frequently

Why work with neighborhoods?

“Traditional wildfire [risk] models assume you're exposed to a wildland flame front. But in the WUI, the threat is often your neighbor's house catching fire. That's why:

- ✓ Individual mitigation is critical,
- ✓ But community-wide action is essential.”

– Nate Wittasek, P.E. - Vice President, Simon, Gumpertz & Heger

Handy Links

- www.nfpa.org/wildfire – all of NFPA's wildfire resources
- www.firewise.org – overall Firewise website
- www.portal.Firewise.org – Application portal for recognition
- On www.nfpa.org or www.firewise.org use “SEARCH” for
 - **State Liaison** to find list of state contacts
 - **Firewise USA sites** to find list of recognized communities

Thank You!

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National Fire Protection Association

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