



THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

FIREWISE BULLETIN

SPRING 2015

TO CHIP OR BURN, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Creating defensible space involves cutting brush and limbing up trees. The question is what to do with the cut fruits of your labor – have it chipped or burn it. In some cases, the answer is almost moot – the brush is not accessible by vehicle, so mechanical chipping is not an option. The only viable options are burning or lop and scatter. Lop and scatter is simply manually cutting things into smaller bits and scattering about, not piling, so they decompose over time. Burning is creating small piles which can be ignited in a controlled fashion.

The recommended approach is chipping utilizing NCCFF's free chipping program. All one needs to do is stack brush butt end out along a road accessible to a truck towing a chipper. Compared to burning, either way one needs to create piles. The difference is chipping is better for the environment and not as labor intensive. It involves making a pile and an online request for a chipper visit – nothing more.

Burning is no longer free nor easy. Burning is controlled by the Bay Area Air Quality Board and CALFIRE. One has needed to apply for a permit to burn and wait for a 'burn day' for years. A 'burn day' is one where the air quality is such that smoke will dissipate and not hang in the air. 'Spare the air day' is the term for not partaking of polluting activities such as burning brush on a given day, so any day designated as Spare the Air is not a burn day. Recently, a nominal fee has been added to permit requests, a \$100 minimum. Prior to igniting a permitted

pile, one must verify it is not a Spare the Air day (confirmed the actual day of planned burn) and also contact CALFIRE to alert them to your intentions. Once all is thumbs up, you may take out the matches.....

However, prior to striking that first match, be very aware of a few more things. You must have the capability for fire suppression at hand, meaning some means of putting out the fire. You must not leave a fire unattended until it is completely, utterly out – meaning hours of tending tinders. In the unfortunate event that the fire gets out of your control and you need to be rescued by the men in the big red truck, you are liable for the cost of putting out your fire.

Compared to burning, chipping is less work and free. Chipping isn't as exciting as a big whoosh as a dry pile ignites, but it is far safer and better for the environment.



Firewise Chipper at work

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N a p a C o m m u n i t i e s F i r e w i s e F o u n d a t i o n

Got gas?

Living in a fire danger zone should make one pause to ponder prior to burning anything at all. Many of us have fire pits, charcoal or wood fired barbecues, wood fired pizza ovens, wood burning fireplaces or stoves. Not every one of these will be used during fire season, but it does not diminish the associated fire dangers. There are alternatives which involve less fire risk while being more environmentally friendly.

It should also be noted that year round, a spare the air day declared by the Bay Area Air Quality Board, precludes burning of wood. This means in the dead of a cold winter, one may not be able to use that cozy wood burning fireplace if a Spare the Air day has been declared.

The alternative to burning wood is gas. Gas fires do not create embers or as much particulate air pollution as wood fires. Though less romantic than wood fires, gas advantages are instant on or off, does not require constant feeding of logs, contributes less to air pollution and is less apt to start a forest fire.

Gas fireplaces and stoves provide instant gratification – flip a switch and have 30,000+ BTU's instantly on. There is no risk of chimney fires or errant embers escaping. No stacking or hauling of wood for fuel. Gas fireplaces are not prohibited from use on Spare the Air days such as a wood fireplace. Another alternative is a pellet stove which uses wood pellets as fuel without generating hazardous embers. Pellet stoves are available which also can be used on Spare the Air days.

Charcoal Barbeques are generally lit with air polluting and flavor imparting lighter fluid, spark inducing paper fired chimney's or electric heating rods. Getting charcoal lit risks creating embers along with using coals to cook. Once cooking is completed, the coals are still a fire risk, especially if there are winds. Some communities in high fire danger zones actually ban the use of charcoal grills for all these reasons. The alternative to charcoal once again is gas. Gas provides a safer, more efficient and less polluting means of cooking. Gas grills are slightly more expensive than charcoal



Attractive convenience of gas

for initial purchase but the operating cost and fire danger is less. Gas grills can be plumbed into house gas (NG or LP) for convenience, eliminating need for exchanging small cylinders. For those who can't live without the smoke flavor coals provide over gas, one can use a wood chip smoker attachment or step up to pellet fired grill. Pellet grill/ smokers provide the convenience of gas with a more intense flavor than charcoal. Pellet grills do cost more to purchase and operate, while providing more intense flavor.

Fire pits are an evening and early morning favorite of many. The fire dangers are the greatest with these wood burning open pits. Starting the fire creates embers. The ember shooting pop of a fire is part of the pit magic. Once again, wood fires are not allowed on Spare the Air days. The safer and more environmental friendly option yet again is a gas fire pit. Instant on and off along with dancing flames which can be enjoyed at any time of year.

You likely already have gas accessible at your house, meaning you've got gas. Now, you need to utilize the gas more and eliminate burning wood or charcoal.

Chipping season off to an early start

Much like many plants budding early this year, the NCCFF chipping program is officially open for business. In anticipation of an early start to fire season and dense brush growth due to our spring like weather with occasional much needed rain, we are starting up the chipper a month early this year.

Chipping is a completely free service for those living in high fire danger zones – meaning just about all of rural Napa County. All one needs to do is stack a pile of brush or limb cuttings butt end out along an access road. The access road need not be paved, just easily passable with a large pickup pulling an equally large chipper.

Once a pile is ready for chipping, you only need to request the service online at www.napafirewise.org or by calling 707- 967-1426.

We need your support

Don't Nix Nixle

Nixle is an emergency alert system utilized by Napa County. It replaced the previous WARN system and provides alerts in both text and email formats. Nixle is used to provide public safety and other advisories such as law enforcement emergencies, road closures,

missing persons, severe weather, etc. with last but not least fire alerts.

Nixle is free to residents and registering is as easy as texting your zip code to 888777 or going online at <https://local.nixle.com/registration>.

The County has endeavored to speed up the emergency notification process such that often a Nixle message is received as quickly as a neighborhood alert, such as Call-Em- All utilized by Firesafe Councils.

There is no downside to joining Nixle beyond receiving messages that

you might not be interested in. The advantage of Nixle is that you will get alerts wherever you may be (as long as there is cell service) and be better informed as to local emergencies, especially fires.

Nixle is a privately held company that offers free and paid notification services to local police departments, county emergency management offices, municipal governments and their agencies.

Join Nixle today and start receiving valuable emergency notifications – it's free and easy to do!



Tis the Season yet Again.....

Repetition is a key to remembering - So be aware that this article is a rerun of a previous year's and one can expect to see yet again in the future.

Tis not yet fire season, so tis the season to prepare for fire season. Now is the time to plan projects to accomplish prior to the brush drying out and the official start of Fire Season.

Extend Safety Perimeter:

Regulations call for minimum brush and weed free perimeters around structures. One needs to remember that these are the minimum distances for safety. Extending beyond what is required increases your safety margin. One should endeavor to extend the effective perimeter each year. After a few years, you'll have a much safer boundary and with the side benefit of a nicer looking landscape.

Brush Removal – a Big Whack Attack:

The hills are green and damp which makes the perfect time for cutting down brush. A chain saw and straight shaft brush whacker with a metal blade make the perfect

combination for attacking brush. The whacker can take down brush to a one inch diameter. The trick is to rev the engine and swing into the cut relatively low, but above rocks and the ground. This effectively clears thin brush and enables access to larger, tougher brush trunks. Chain saws should be used for

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Defensible space can create a park like setting

Tis the Season Continued from page 3

larger diameters, taking care to not nick rocks with the blade or allow blade to be jammed by felling brush. Properly used, these tools will quickly clear a large swath through whatever brush encountered. You'll spend far more time hauling your cuttings away for chipping than the actual cutting.

Metal blades and dry grass don't mix – they are a recipe for sparking a fire like you are working to protect against. Brush cutting should be limited to this green time of year, prior to the hills turning California golden (otherwise known as brown).

Weeds – Kill or Cut:

Attacking weeds is all about timing. The timing is different depending upon method choice: herbicide or string trimmer. It is an individual's choice as to preference between the two. Many are against herbicides and prefer whacking. In terms of environment, however, it is literally pick your poison – spray chemicals on the ground or pollute the air burning a two stroke gas and oil mix. Spraying is faster and easier than whacking. The problem with spraying is timing. If you spray before the last rain of the season, you'll be spraying again. With cutting, you wait until everything starts to dry out and further rains are unlikely.

Trees – Crown Lift Surgery

Limbing up trees to a fire safe height and removing dead limbs

is something that can be safely done year round. Pruning shears, pruning hand saw, chain saw and a pole chain saw are my weapons of choice. One needs to be careful to cut close to the parent trunk or limb without nicking or cutting it. Partially cutting through a branch and letting it fall peeling back bark from the parent is also poor form. Lower limbs are easily identified as are accessible dead limbs.

A few words of caution should be noted when trimming trees. Trees are stressed due to lack of water during the summer and fall months. Trimming a stressed tree can make it more susceptible to disease and insect attacks, making now the better time for trimming. One should also never remove more than 15% of the crown in a given season of trimming.

Beyond this, it is recommended that one leave tree trimming to a trained arborist.

Safety

It goes without saying that safety is paramount. Proper safety gear should be worn at all times. My favorite is a helmet with face shield and ear protection. Additionally, I wear long pants and long shirt sleeves to minimize exposure to poison oak, scratchy brush and sun. One should also know how to use equipment properly prior to any weekend warrior activity.



Logo-fied trailer

Fully Equipped

NCFF has acquired an equipment trailer to house the tools of the defensible space trade. The trailer is now easy to spot thanks to the efforts of the Napa City sign shop. Full graphics have been applied to the sides and rear of the trailer to proudly herald Napa Firewise. We would like to extend a special thank you to Larry Hancock for his artistry and efforts along with Jeff Folks for facilitating the work.

In the chips?

If not, use the Firewise chipping program, it's free!

- Chipping requests online www.napafirewise.org or call 707-967-1426.
- Chipping season is March - September!

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