



Southeast Fire Management Success Story



Alabama Firewise Communities Workshop Attracts Local Support

A Firewise Communities workshop was met with local support on October 30 in Alexander City, Alabama. Close to thirty participants met at City Hall to discuss ways they can work together with their communities to take preventative wildfire protection measures. Recent wildfire losses to homes and lives in California reinforce the need for Firewise Community planning.


When wildfires approach the wildland-urban interface, it is simply not possible for fire engines to protect every house in a community. “Fire departments are staffed for the routine,” explained Firewise Coordinator Joe Lynch. However residents and local officials can work together to take preventative actions to reduce potential impacts of wildfires on their community.

The Firewise Communities program is a national initiative designed to reach beyond the fire service by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others to protect people, property, and natural resources from the dangers of wildland fire before a fire starts.

“We’re going to create a coalition approach,” said Lynch. During the workshop, federal and state agencies, representatives from local communities, and individual homeowners discussed proactive approaches to designing, building, and maintaining homes and properties to be compatible with the natural environment. They recognized that compatibility with nature would help homes, structures and ultimately the entire community to withstand wildland fire events.

The easiest time to incorporate Firewise principles is often during the planning stages of a new community. However, it’s never too late to start. Firewise Coordinator Julie

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Shiyou-Woodard explained that a range of techniques communities can incorporate to mitigate hazards. She suggests started with easy, inexpensive choices. “Everyone should be able to clearly label their house number to help emergency officials find their home,” she said. She also suggested clearing pine straw from roofs and lawns.

The best approach involves utilizing the wide range of Firewise practices. The Firewise Communities program offers a series of practical steps (landscaping, home construction and design, community planning, etc.) that individuals and community groups can take to protect themselves and their properties from the risks of wildfire. Relying on only one element of a Firewise program is not enough to protect against the danger of fire in the wildland/urban interface.

Examples of Firewise techniques for property owners include creating a defensible space around residential structures by thinning trees and brush; choosing fire-resistant plants; selecting ignition-resistant building materials; positioning structures away from slopes; and working with firefighters to develop emergency plans.

This Firewise Communities workshop was sponsored by the Jefferson-Shelby Wildland Urban Interface Advisory Council, Inc., in association with Horseshoe Bend National Military Park. Other agencies represented at the workshop included the Cawalo Resource Conservation and Development Council, the Tennessee Valley and Northwest Rural Conservation and Development Council, Birmingham Fire and Rescue, Tallapoosa County, Alabama Emergency Management, Alabama Forestry Commission, USDA Forest Service, Eufala Fire Department, Birmingham Regional Planning Committee, Alexander City Fire Department, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Auburn University, and the Southern Alabama Regional Planning Commission.

For more information about Firewise visit www.firewise.org.

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