

Topanga Canyon, CA Designated a Firewise Community

As a result of fire hardening their homes, most residents will qualify for a reduction in their insurance rates

Topanga Canyon is now officially recognized as a “Firewise” community by the National Fire Protection Association (“NFPA”) and CalFire, which means that Topangans have taken a quantifiable number of actions on their property and within the community to make their homes and the wider landscape more resistant to wildfires and the damage they cause. This recognition confers more than mere “bragging rights.” It entitles those of us within the recognized Firewise area to a discount on certain insurance plans as long as the community continues to meet its Firewise obligations and remains “in good standing.” This designation invokes a sense of community responsibility and requires sustained action by residents at both the individual and collective level. Topanga did not receive this designation overnight, and it cannot maintain it without a continuous commitment from residents and community leaders.

The body responsible for developing our Community Action Plan and applying for this Firewise status consists of a diverse committee of leaders from multiple organizations in the Canyon with public safety, emergency management and community stewardship goals as their primary focus. Participating organizations include: the Topanga Town Council, which has taken the lead on administering the program, TCEP, the Topanga Canyon Fire Safe Council, Arson Watch, the Topanga Chamber of Commerce, and the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains. *To view all Committee members, please refer to the list at the end of this release.*

Many years in the making

After more than a decade, and thousands of volunteer hours from local organizations, Topanga Canyon is now recognized as a Firewise community. “This didn’t happen overnight,” say Beth Burnam and Ryan Ulyate, Co-Presidents of the Topanga Canyon Fire Safe Council (TCFSC). “It took us 12 years to get up to this point. The insurance discount is huge, but it needs to be tied to an understanding of how much work we’ve done in Topanga, and how much more needs to be done.”

While homeowners who have certain insurance plans will benefit from the lower rates, residents need to take action to keep the Firewise designation and discount going. To remain “in good standing” with this program, communities must meet a set of voluntary criteria on an annual basis.

One hour per home

Residents are encouraged to submit an annual list of their wildfire mitigation activities, actions and expenses on a simple [Firewise Submission form](#), which will soon be accessible on *One Topanga* (www.onetopanga.com). The goal is to have the equivalent of one volunteer hour (valued at roughly \$30) per residential dwelling unit. In Topanga, that would amount to roughly 3,200 hours or \$96,000. The list of qualifying items is long and includes such activities as annual brush removal, installing ember-resistant vents, and cleaning debris from gutters. Long-time Topanga resident, Clark Stevens said “I spend at least eight to ten hours every year weed-

whacking and trimming trees so I don't think it will be hard to gather the required hours to keep the designation." This program is a win-win, creating an opportunity for Topangans to fire-harden their homes and learn wildfire mitigation best practices while collecting/recording the man hours to maintain the Firewise status.

"Topanga has been on the cutting-edge of fire prevention awareness and practices with community-based fire prevention education, fire mitigation and systematic evacuation procedures." said Carrie Carrier, President of the Topanga Town Council. So much so, the national Firewise USA program requested information from the Topanga Town Council to provide a framework to help other neighborhoods get organized, find direction, and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community and to reduce wildfire risks at the local level.

We've still got a long way to go.

"This community can and should keep doing more to be able to survive a wildfire." Ulyate said. "We provide practical steps to homeowners, like what they can do, especially in the first 5 feet around their homes. Every hour spent on home hardening, attending a Zoom lecture, or getting a free Home Ignition Zone evaluation counts. The bottom line is that we all can and should do better, and this is a great incentive!"

Getting up to speed – important links

To learn more about the Firewise USA program and what it takes for a community to qualify, visit <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>.

To view the Topanga Firewise Map and confirm that your home is located within its boundaries, visit the link below and input your address to confirm its inclusion:

<https://lacounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5209cbbab343404784a9c7e01bf30bc3>

Residential Property Insurance Companies Currently Offering Discounts for Fire Hardened Homes and/or Communities:

<https://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/105-type/95-guides/03-res/Insurers-Currently-Offering-Discounts.cfm>

To learn more about what you can do to "harden" your home against wildfires, visit www.defensiblespace.org and www.ntcfsc.org.

The Topanga Town Council would like to emphasize that it will only support and promote those activities that are both effective and environmentally-friendly. Thankfully, when it comes to being "firewise," the most effective actions are generally those things that are not controversial, such as hardening your home and removing excess brush.

Topanga Firewise Committee members:

- Beth Burnam - Topanga Canyon Fire Safe Council and Firewise Leader
- Will Carey - Arson Watch
- Carrie Carrier - Topanga Town Council and Firewise Leader

- Max Kramer - Kramer Insurance Services
- Antoine Kunsch - Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM)
- Linnea Mielcarek - Neighborhood Network, TCEP
- Ryan Ulyate –Topanga Canyon Fire Safe Council