



What is Firewise USA?

A Firewise USA community is a neighborhood that's taken steps to lower the risk of wildfire damage to homes and properties. It's part of a national program that encourages people to work together with local fire departments and others to make their area safer from wildfires.

In a Firewise USA community, residents team up to put in place strategies to prevent wildfires, like clearing away flammable materials near homes, using fire-resistant building materials, and educating everyone about wildfire safety. People in these communities are actively involved in planning, doing, and keeping up with wildfire safety efforts.

What is "Recognition"?

To become recognized as a Firewise USA community, a neighborhood or homeowners' association has to meet specific standards set by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), which runs the Firewise USA program. This includes assessing wildfire risks, making a plan to deal with them, putting that plan into action, and keeping everyone informed about wildfire safety.

Step 1

Step 1 involves gathering your neighbors and creating an oversight board or committee. This committee will work together to make important decisions about fire safety in your community. Consider contacting experts like the local fire department or Firewise consultants to share their knowledge about the process. You will also need to identify a leader who will be the program's point of contact. Once the neighborhood committee is formed, its members will work together to identify the community's biggest fire risks, create a plan to reduce those risks over several years, and make sure the community stays on track with its fire safety goals. Each year the committee will also take care of the annual renewal requirements needed to retain an "in good standing" status from Firewise USA.

Action Items:

- Schedule an Orientation Meeting for SCFSC Presentation: Date and Location
- Advertise the Orientation Meeting to your Community.
- At the Meeting: Vote whether to proceed as a community or not
- With majority vote to form a community, ask for Committee Volunteers
- Form a Committee
- Vote for a Lead Contact Person
- Create a Community Contact List of all households in the Community with house addresses.
- Create a way to keep the Community updated about field trips and meetings.

Step 2

Step 2 involves defining your community. A Firewise community can be as small as 8 houses or as large as 2,500 houses. Defining the physical boundaries of your community also determines how many individual homes are included. It's possible to have multiple Firewise USA sites within a city, town, or planned community. If you're unsure how to define your boundaries, or if you're concerned about coordinating a large number of households, consider focusing on just your street or immediate neighborhood area. You will need to hold 2 leadership committee meetings and 1 full community meeting each year. Sometimes, starting small is more manageable. You will need to create an outlined map of your proposed Firewise community. The Shasta County Fire Safe Council or CalFire can assist you in creating or obtaining a map.

Action Items:

- Define your boundaries to include all of those who attended the meeting and wanted to be included.
- Create a parcel level map of the Community Boundary.

Step 3

Step 3 is all about teamwork. The Firewise Committee works together to write a Wildfire Risk Assessment, which will be the committee's primary tool to determine the risk reduction priorities and activities for your community. This is the initial step to becoming a nationally recognized Firewise USA community. The community risk assessment is intended to document the overall general neighborhood conditions that are visible from common areas and does not need to provide details on each individual building. Firewise provides an easy-to-follow template for the assessment process. The Shasta County Fire Safe Council's Regional Coordinator can help complete any sections of the assessment if your committee needs assistance.

To complete the assessment, you'll go on a field trip with your Firewise Committee, neighbors, and experts from agencies like the forestry and fire departments and the fire council. The risk assessment should focus on how vulnerable the homes are to flying embers and different types of fires. It should also document the types of houses and how close they are, the plants and trees and how close they are, and the structure of the landscape.

Action Items:

- Contact SCFSC to Schedule your Field Trip.
- Fill out the Risk Assessment Form:
<https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Project/Storefront/Catalog/Files/Firewise/Get-started/FirewiseCommAssess.pdf>

Step 4

Step 4 focuses on setting priorities. Your board or committee will create a 3-Year Action Plan that lists and ranks the most important steps the community can take to lower the risk of wildfire damage. This plan will include projects like building firebreaks or improving evacuation routes, as well as suggested actions for homeowners such as clearing vegetation near homes, and educational activities. The list will highlight the actions that community members aim to finish

each year or within 3 years. Communities in California are required to use The California-Specific 3-Year Action Plan form. If your 3-Year Plan is not on this template, your application will not be accepted. The Action Plan is required to be updated at least every three years or if circumstances change such as completing activities, experiencing a fire or a natural disaster, or new construction in community.

Action Items:

- Complete the 3-Year Action Plan using the California Template:
https://readyforwildfire.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/California_3Year_Action_Plan_Template.docx

Step 5

Step 5 focuses on community works. The Firewise program is designed to provide education to help property owners do their own home hardening and defensible space. Community members will also team up to work on projects that benefit everyone in the neighborhood, so now is the time to start working on your planned Wildfire Risk Reduction tasks, such as brush clearing, adding gutter guards, or educating others. When community members volunteer their time, these hours are recorded as Investment Hours for your Firewise application. Each community is required to invest 1 volunteer hour per house per year. For example, if your community has 50 homes, then 50 hours of work must be logged and reported each year. When you apply for Firewise recognition, you will need to report one year's worth of Investment Hours. However, you don't have to wait a whole year to apply; you just need to have worked the number of required hours you will need per year. Although high community involvement will help create a more defensible neighborhood, it can be difficult to get every household to participate. As long as you collect the correct number of hours per year, it doesn't matter which households they come from.

Action Items

- Become familiar with the Volunteer Hourly Worksheet and the Firewise Time Expense Investment Examples
- Create a Log of Investment Hours. Investment Hours are hours worked by community members or money spent (\$25.43 = 1 hour). You can use the Firewise Worksheet or choose to make your own.

Step 6

It's time to apply. The Committee applies for Firewise recognition by creating an account in the Firewise Portal. The portal will walk you through the steps of reporting the members of your committee, uploading your Community Risk Assessment, the map of your community's boundaries, your 3-Year Action Plan, and log of Investment Hours. Once all required fields are completed, you will submit your application via the portal and your Firewise state liaison will review your application. If you need help navigating your portal contact the Shasta Fire Safe Council for assistance.

Action Items:

- Create a Firewise account at: <https://portal.firewise.org/user/login>
- Gather your documents and map and follow the Application Instructions in the Portal.

Step 7

Your Firewise state liaison will notify your Lead Contact Person when your application has been approved or denied. If your application is approved, you are officially a recognized Firewise Community. If your application is denied, your state liaison will explain the issues with your application and how to correct them. Once these issues have been resolved, you can resubmit your application.

Action Items:

- Contact SCFSC for assistance correcting the issues that are needed to reapply.

Step 8

Congratulations on becoming an officially recognized Firewise site! To remain in Good Standing (ie retain your Firewise status), you will need to renew your status annually by reporting on your yearly activities and Investment Hours. All reporting is done in the Firewise portal. Enjoy your new community.

Action Items:

- Log Volunteer Hours every year and submit them to the Portal.
- Hold 2 Committee Meetings every year.
- Hold 1 Community Meeting every year.
- Update your 3-Year Action Plan in 3 years.