

Fire Safe Sonoma

Firewise USA®

Becoming a Firewise Community in Sonoma County

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5-1-2025

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STARTING A Firewise Community

INTRODUCTION

Thank you in advance for doing your part in protecting your community against wildfire. Before you begin the process of organizing a community into a Firewise USA® Community, please seek guidance from Fire Safe Sonoma, the countywide fire safe council / Firewise USA Regional Coordinator.

WHY A FIREWISE COMMUNITY?

Fire is a fact of life in California. At the same time, a growing number of people are living where wildfires are a real risk. California's wildland ecosystems are fire dependent; they need fire to survive. Fire thins the vegetation, giving plants room to grow. It cracks seed casings and replenishes the soil, allowing new life to thrive. Although fires are inevitable, you can take steps to protect your home, neighborhood, and family's safety.

Learning to live with fire means protecting our community assets from potential wildfire damage. Here is what a Firewise Community can do:

- Mobilize people in the community who stand to lose something of value to fire
- Create a powerful group initiative
- Save lives, property and money from wildfire

FIREWISE USA

The NFPA Firewise USA® recognition program is designed to help people learn about wildfire and how they can make their homes and neighborhoods safer. It's based on research that shows how to prepare homes to withstand embers, and prevent flames or surface fire from igniting the home and its immediate surroundings, by working in an area known as the home ignition zone (HIZ). This is the home and everything around it within 100 feet.

In many neighborhoods, home ignition zones often overlap onto adjacent properties—meaning that homes are closer than 100 feet to one another. This makes the conditions of neighboring homes and vegetation a part of the wildfire threat. It's extremely important that neighbors work collaboratively with each other—and talk with each other—to reduce their shared risk.

Firewise USA® is a voluntary recognition program that provides a framework to help neighbors get organized, find direction, and increase the ignition resistance of their homes and communities from wildfire. Moreover, California has enacted regulations that require insurance companies to recognize Firewise USA designated communities by providing discounts to property owners.

Firewise USA® is a volunteer program that provides a set of criteria that residents choose to work towards. It is not required for individuals in wildfire prone areas to participate in or be a part of in order to take risk reduction actions. **Fire Safe Sonoma** has been appointed as the **Firewise Regional Coordinator for the County of Sonoma** by CAL FIRE and can aid any community groups looking to become a Firewise Community in good standing in the following ways:

- Providing a platform for community residents and organizations to express concerns about public safety issues and safeguard social and economic interests.
- Bringing together public and private sector organizations with a shared interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation.
- Identifying and implementing projects related to fuel reduction, education, and outreach.
- Developing an Action Plan for the community to address wildfire risks. The Action Plan identifies mitigation measures to reduce potential loss of life, property, homes, businesses, natural and historic areas, and other assets threatened by wildfires.
- Enhancing the likelihood that homes in the community remain insurable.

Firewise USA® sites meet a set of criteria to earn national recognition, and continue to meet specific criteria annually to stay in good standing with the program. The words “certified” and “certification” are not affiliated with the Firewise USA® program. To be “certified” implies that an individual has proven specific competency in a job role or skill set. An example would be a certified electrical safety technician. Organizations can also be certified, generally meaning they meet qualifications that give them access to specific benefits or resources. An example would be the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certification that validates that a business is 51 percent owned, controlled, operated, and managed by a woman or women. Firewise USA® sites are not certified, and neither do individuals nor their properties within site boundaries receive certification. Sites that successfully meet the participation requirements are provided a “Certificate of Recognition.” This is provided upon approval of the initial application for recognition and on an annual basis upon approval of the renewal application.

THE BASICS

The process usually begins with at least three initial virtual meetings with Fire Safe Sonoma and the interested parties, followed by a public Firewise Community Meeting

where the new site is premiered and where an “ask” that the community members get involved is pitched. Following the Community Meeting there is a series of four more meetings where Fire Safe Sonoma coaches and aids the resident leader(s) in the completion of a wildfire risk analysis and then assists in the application process. (See Appendix-A for meeting agendas)

At the time of the publication of this Handbook, over 30 Firewise Communities in Sonoma County have partnered with the Fire Safe Sonoma and our state and local fire agencies to make their communities safer, better places to live by **Organizing, Planning, Doing, and Telling.**

ORGANIZING

Organizing goal: Create a board or committee of volunteers to represent your community, including residents and partners such as local forestry agencies or the fire department. Identify a resident leader who will be the program point of contact.

CREATE THE BOARD OR COMMITTEE

Your first challenge is to recruit partner champions and create a **board or committee** of volunteers to represent your community, and to identify a **Resident Leader** who will be the program point of contact.

The board or committee is a group made up of residents and other applicable stakeholders. Fire Safe Sonoma will work with the board/committee and will guide the efforts of the **emerging Firewise USA® site**, using a **community wildfire risk analysis** to identify and prioritize projects, actions and/or activities **to include** in the action plan that likely will reduce risk from wildfire.

Which term to use, board or committee? If a stand-alone independent community site is being formed, then it should be called a board. However, if the group is a subgroup of a local Fire Safe Council, HOA, COPE Group or similar, it should be considered as a committee, working under the leadership of that particular organization.

A good way to recruit champions for the board/committee is to write a letter and/or send an email to each potential board or committee member explaining the benefits of forming a Firewise Community and invite them to a Firewise meeting. **Example of recruitment letter.** During this meeting Fire Safe Sonoma will explain the benefits of and the process of becoming a Firewise USA® Community in good standing. Fire Safe Sonoma can help facilitate this first informational meeting and it can be a house-party hosted by one of the board/committee members, or it can be a virtual meeting that Fire Safe Sonoma can host.

When recruiting board/committee members, consider if there are champions besides yourself who can contribute to your board or committee. Find anyone with special skills, such as leadership, social media, or technology, who could offer their time. Think about local political leaders who can mobilize the community for fire safety and represent these concerns in government. Also, look at local groups interested in fire safety, like Municipal Advisory Committees (MAC), Citizens Organized and Prepared for Emergencies (COPE),

and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), who might want to get involved. Invite these potential members to the informational meeting.

IDENTIFY THE RESIDENT LEADER(S)

Once the board or committee has been recruited, they must identify someone as the **Resident Leader** for the Firewise USA® site. The resident leader is a primary member of the **Startup Team**, which consists of the resident leader, Fire Safe Sonoma, and the **state and/or local fire officials** who will aid in the process of becoming a Firewise USA® Community in good standing.

Keep in mind that your fire officials will have valuable insight into your community's fire environment. They can also relate the wildland fire safety and risk reduction needs of the community to the goals of local fire plans (i.e the County Community Wildfire Protection Plan and/or the CAL FIRE LNU Strategic Fire Plan). The fire department will also be able to provide ideas that will help motivate the board or committee to action that can result in some early successes. Moreover, the Firewise USA® Community Assessment/application asks that you list the principal participants who assisted in data gathering and development of the assessment (including name, role/organization, phone and email).

Fire Safe Sonoma *requires* that participants include a CAL FIRE and/or local fire agency representative, and a representative of Fire Safe Sonoma (i.e. the FSS staff member assigned to Firewise), in addition to at least one Firewise® board/committee member (the resident leader). Moreover, CAL FIRE, is the Firewise USA State Liaison, and is responsible for reviewing and approving new site applications, and may review annual renewal applications.

Make sure the Chair of the local Firewise board or committee is clearly indicated. This person will be receiving correspondence from the national program on behalf of the community.

Assessment Participants

List the principal participants who assisted in data gathering and development of this assessment (include name, role/organization, phone and email). Participants can include your district forester, or Firewise® Board members for instance.

Participant 1				
Participant 2				
Participant 3				
Participant 4				
Participant 5				

Fire Safe Sonoma and the fire agencies cannot create a Firewise USA® Community in good standing without the community participation. Because the formation of a Firewise USA® Community is meant to be a grass-roots effort and moved forward by the community residents, the resident leader is ultimately the one responsible for taking the initiative of moving the process along and completing the initial application and annual renewal via the Firewise USA® online management portal (Firewise® Portal), with assistance from Fire Safe Sonoma. A site may have two resident leaders assigned in the Firewise® Portal.

Facts About Firewise Participation

The Firewise USA® process helps communities and firefighters. Participants solve problems and form better relationships with emergency responders. Firewise resident leaders, their committees, and local fire staff collaborate to reduce wildfire risk. This builds community spirit and enhances local wildfire readiness.

The Firewise USA® process follows the diffusion process, which is the spread of a new idea from introduction to general acceptance. Typical population characteristics are:

- Innovators: 3%
- Early Adopters: 13%
- Early Majority: 34%
- Late Majority: 34%
- Laggards: 16%

In the Firewise USA® process, only about 3% of the population will initially be active participants, known as "spark plugs." Most residents will only observe the completion of a **community wildfire risk assessment** and the creation of an **action plan**. If 25% of the population participates in the first event, that is considered very acceptable. Participation will likely increase with subsequent events as more community members see the benefits and take action. Assuming the organizers have created a simple and feasible plan, participation will grow each year.

Planning goal: *The board or committee defines the boundaries of the site and completes a community wildfire risk assessment. From the risk assessment, the board/committee creates a multi-year action plan to identify and prioritize actions to reduce ignition risk to homes.*

PLANNING

Once the **Startup Team** has been set up, they will begin the planning process to form a Firewise **Site**. This includes **defining the site boundaries**, conducting a community survey to obtain risk analysis data, and the completion of the **Firewise Community Assessment** and an **Action Plan**.

DEFINE THE BOUNDARY

The startup team needs to define the site's boundaries logically. Although the resident leader or board/committee may have ideas about these boundaries, the boundary should be established *after* consulting local fire officials and Fire Safe Sonoma. These parties often understand unique local factors such as neighboring Firewise sites, local politics, fire plans, wildfire protection plans, and fire district boundaries that could affect the site boundary.

The site boundary is often influenced by the following:

- 🔥 Property ownership – private or public
- 🔥 Neighboring Firewise Communities.
- 🔥 The fire agency responsible for emergency response.
- 🔥 The Supervisorial District.
- 🔥 Whether or not the area is part of an existing organization.
- 🔥 Whether or not the geography is in a Potential Operational Delineation (POD) area.
- 🔥 Inhabited areas that are at risk to wildland fire.
- 🔥 Areas with critical infrastructure—such as escape routes, municipal water supply structures, and major power or communication lines—that are at risk from fire disturbance.

After defining the site boundary, Fire Safe Sonoma staff will create a shapefile of the polygon. This shapefile will be used in Arc GIS as part of the comprehensive risk analysis.

How Large Should a Site Be?

Firewise USA® participation requires a minimum of 8 individual dwelling units not to exceed 2,500 units within the site's identified boundary. **However, CAL FIRE, the state agency responsible for Firewise USA in California, prefers that the minimum number of dwellings be around 25 and the maximum around 250.** Note that multiple Firewise USA® sites may be formed within a larger area, or within a city/town or master-planned community/HOA. In that case, the area will be one site subdivided into neighborhoods or zones.

Regardless, the size of a site is governed by the limit of its effectiveness. Successful Firewise USA® participation requires commitment from homeowners and residents. No

two communities have the same social dynamics and, thus, no two communities have to be the same size for a successful program. Successful Firewise USA® participation requires commitment from homeowners and residents. No two communities have the same social dynamics and, thus, no two communities have to be the same size for a successful program. However, communities beyond the traditional neighborhood size generally have difficulty meeting the effectiveness and individual engagement criteria required for a long-term commitment to wildfire mitigation. Cities and counties lose their neighborhood identity, and thus their homeowner activism across that size of community. Successful, long term, participating communities are those where homeowners and residents are engaged in reducing their home ignition potential.

The following tips can be used as guidelines in determining whether a community is of an appropriate size to maintain itself as a long-term, active Firewise USA® Community:

- 🔥 The community functions effectively as a unit
- 🔥 Neighbors are able to work together on a wildfire mitigation project
- 🔥 Most residents are willing to take part in a Firewise community Action Plan
- 🔥 Neighbors can organize without depending on municipal or agency guidance

Name the Site

Part of defining the boundary includes giving the site a name to give it an identity. Ideally this happens in the first meeting but, like naming a newborn, it can take some time. Fire Safe Sonoma recommends that you use a specific geography or community identity in the name like the conventions for naming of a fire incident. For example, the Hollydale, Canyon Terrace (HCT) Firewise Community, or the Gericke Road Firewise Community.

COMPLETE A COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RISK ASSESSMENT

The startup team, with continued participation and drive from the resident leader(s) will work collaboratively to complete the ***Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment***.

The Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment

The Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment (See Appendix-B) is an assessment that focuses on the risk of home ignition from wildfires by looking at the conditions of the homes and surrounding home ignition zones. It is used to help guide residents on the most effective actions to prevent home ignitions and wildfire disasters. The Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment must be updated every five years.

Various methods and scales exist for assessing wildfire risk. The Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment concentrates on the risk of home ignition due to wildfires and provides guidance to residents on effective measures to prevent such ignitions, which could lead to wildfire disasters. Additionally, data analysis drives recommendations for mitigations, which are included in the site's **California Required 3-Year Action Plan**.

The Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment aims to provide a community-wide perspective that identifies areas of effective wildfire risk mitigation and areas needing improvement within 100 feet of homes. Additionally, Fire Safe Sonoma and CAL FIRE use this information to incorporate community-scale projects where appropriate, such as roadside hazard reduction projects and community-scale fuel breaks.

We will go into more detail on how best to complete the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment and California Required 3-Year Action Plan later.

Methodology

The methodology Fire Safe Sonoma uses to complete the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment includes a combination of wildfire research analytical tools and information available to the team including a **Firewise Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey** distributed digitally via email, and if necessary through direct mail and through in person contacts; feedback from at least one public **Firewise Community Meeting**; a **Fire Department Capabilities Survey**; the **Fire Safe Sonoma CWPP RA Tool**; relevant map data; and the **Sonoma County Wildfire Resilience Planner**, an analytical risk assessment tool available online at: <https://sonoma.resilienceplanner.org/>

The overall assessment and subsequent analysis takes into consideration the following:

- 🔥 Fire history
- 🔥 Concerns presented by common/open space areas or adjacent public lands
- 🔥 Vegetation types
- 🔥 Slope and aspect
- 🔥 Access/egress
- 🔥 Fire department capabilities and water supply
- 🔥 Housing density & year built
- 🔥 Structural characteristics (roofing, siding, decks)
- 🔥 Vulnerability of homes to ember, surface fire, and crown fire
- 🔥 Immediate hazards within the home ignition zone on individual properties

If there is already a local Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that includes your site, the startup team should refer to it to obtain relevant information.

While the Fire Safe Sonoma method is more robust and involved than the typical Firewise USA® method, we feel that it yields a more comprehensive result, and the Fire Safe Sonoma team can help resident leaders along the path to forming a Firewise USA® Community in Good Standing. At the end of the day, the recommendations provided by the completed assessment are the board/committee's primary tool in deciding what **projects, actions or activities** that should be prioritized within the site's boundaries.

The Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey

The first step in completing the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment is to gather and record data from field observations within the site and use that data to inform the **Observations section** of the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment. This is accomplished by using the Firewise Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey, which is part of the risk analysis methodology.

The Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey is distributed to residents through email early in the process. If there is no available email list, a postcard with a QR code and link to the survey can be mailed to residents, or the survey can be mailed directly with a return envelope. Fire Safe Sonoma has utilized all of these methods at various times.

The email method is probably the easiest way to gather the required information, and one of the most exact because people know their homes well. The responses provide the Firewise board/committee with a baseline of how engaged the community is in community scale wildfire preparedness/safety. The survey should remain open until the data analysis begins. **The survey is not about code enforcement and the assessment itself does not carry any penalties. Moreover, the information collected is used solely for data analysis and is not shared.**

It is imperative that at least ten percent of the dwellings within the site are surveyed to obtain a *reasonable* dataset so the campaign may have to be done more than once to get enough responses. If there are too few results provided by the community residents through the Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey, actual site visits ("**windshield assessments**") may be necessary to obtain enough data to make the Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey valid. Because of trespassing concerns, this approach only allows the gathering of data from the street. As such, the data collected is likely to be much less accurate than the data from a self-reporting survey because typically only the front of the home is visible from the street and several questions might not be accurately answered using this method.

It is important to keep in mind that this is a community-wide view and is meant to report on the overall conditions of the entire site, not specific properties.

While “**crowdsourcing**” the data gathering using the Firewise Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey rather than conducting individual home risk assessments is an acceptable method of gathering data, an actual home assessment project may end up becoming a recommend project for the ***California Required 3-Year Action Plan*** (described in detail later) to gather better data over time.

From time to time someone suggests that we simply complete the survey from the information we have on hand instead of asking folks to complete a survey. While this is possible, it misses a couple of key objectives. The first is to put information in front of community residents to get them thinking about their individual wildfire risk, and the second is to inspire individuals to get involved in the overall community effort.

As mentioned earlier, the Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey is meant to collect information to inform the Observations section of the Firewise USA® Community Wildfire Risk Assessment. However, the specific information gathered includes the following areas of focus:

- ✿ The home itself
- ✿ The Intermediate Zone: 5–30 feet from the furthest exterior point of the home.
- ✿ The Intermediate Zone: 5–30 feet from the furthest exterior point of the home.
- ✿ The Extended Zone: 30–100 feet, out to 200 feet (where applicable).
- ✿ Common areas or nearby public lands suitable for community-scale fire breaks.

Fire Safe Sonoma also relies on the Firewise resident leader(s) to provide the following data:

- ✿ The condition of ingress/egress routes for the community
- ✿ The existence or lack of street signs and address numbers

The Firewise Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey findings, observations and percentages collected are then used to inform and aid in completing the *Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment as well as* help to describe a snapshot of the community’s status in support of pointing to key areas of focus.

Firewise Community Meeting

To create a Firewise USA® site, it is essential to involve the community. After organizing the initial team and defining the community's name and boundaries, you should conduct a ***Firewise Community Meeting*** to explain the concept and encourage involvement.

The Firewise Community Meeting agenda is meant to be simple and uncomplicated. Time will be set aside for local fire officials to speak and to respond to questions. In this meeting it is important to avoid discussing controversial, divisive topics. Fire Safe Sonoma staff can work with the resident leader(s) to draft an agenda. (Sample agendas can be found in Appendix-C)

This community meeting should include the following elements:

- 🔥 Introductions
 - FD commentary
 - D-Space & Structural Hardening basics presentation
- 🔥 Firewise presentation
 - Why Firewise
 - The process & timeline
 - The community survey and analysis
 - Action plan
 - Community commitment (discussed later in this handbook)
- 🔥 Next steps

It is best to hold the meeting in a public location such as the local community center, school auditorium or library where everyone will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. However, it can also be virtual or hybrid depending on the technical resources available to the team members. Fire Safe Sonoma can aid with securing a meeting venue, and in some cases, aid with the technology.

Assigning a Facilitator

A meeting facilitator is necessary for the Community Meeting. The meeting facilitator should remain neutral, understand the diverse views of members, and place them in the context of the larger issue. The facilitator should be impartial and able to assess attendees' issues and concerns. Fire Safe Sonoma staff have experience working with people to achieve consensus and can serve as the meeting facilitator if required. A person should be designated to record meeting minutes to keep track of comments, concerns, and new ideas for projects. If Fire Safe Sonoma is facilitating the meeting a Fire Safe Sonoma staff member will take meeting minutes.

Targeting Future Members

Fire safety involves the whole community and the health of the Firewise board or committee depends upon constant efforts to involve more people. Having a sign-in sheet can help to grow your community roster. It is also a good idea to enlist volunteers to focus on membership recruitment. Remember, it may take several months to convince certain partners to take part in the Firewise board or committee. In fact, some partners may not join the Firewise board or committee until a fire threatens. This fire will create a window

of opportunity. During this period of heightened awareness and concern, the Firewise board or committee can attract new members and advance fire safe programs.

Discuss Wildfire Safety Concerns & Determine Feasibility

Attendees will be asked to share concerns about life safety and property protection during the meeting. They will also identify resources and suggest how each community member can contribute to the site's success. The Startup Team can use audience feedback to prioritize fire-safe projects. Keep in mind that new Firewise communities often start with small projects, which yield quick results and build momentum for larger undertakings.

Include a Map of the Community

A large map to share is a great focal point at meetings. Sharing a map at the Community Meeting will help attendees identify areas of concern and high fire hazards. It also enables them to see their location relative to geography and landmarks. Fire Safe Sonoma may assist in creating this map.

Share the Firewise Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey

Take advantage of the opportunity to get people to fill out the Community Wildfire Risk Assessment Survey on paper or on an iPad at the Firewise Community Meeting. Getting community approval to move forward with Firewise can also coincide with asking people to fill out the survey. This is perhaps the easiest and most accurate way to gather this information. This is also likely to get one of the highest levels of community responses.

Share Fire Safety Brochures and Materials

Fire Safe Sonoma offers extensive information on wildfire safety that can be displayed on a side table during the meeting. Additionally, the local fire department may have pertinent materials to contribute. It is advisable to coordinate to ensure these resources are available at the meeting.

Fire Department Survey

Knowing the capabilities of the fire department is critical to conducting an objective, meaningful, local wildland fire risk analysis. Additionally, knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of a community's fire suppression resources can help the board/committee identify projects, actions and/or activities to maximize those resources.

Fire Safe Sonoma has created a form for the responding fire agency to complete that will provide the board/committee with this knowledge. The survey contains information on the following:

- 🔥 The FD type, volunteer, career or combination
- 🔥 The level of training
- 🔥 If the FD conducts wildland fire safety inspections
- 🔥 Initial alarm resources



Completing the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment

The risk assessment form gathers data for the Firewise USA® Program. It aims to create a community snapshot, identifying vulnerabilities to address and finding community strengths. Firewise USA® requires updates every five years.

Your Firewise resident leader, with input from the board/committee, will complete the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment form. Fire Safe Sonoma will assist also, but it's essential for your community to learn how to identify and reduce the wildfire risks *through* the assessment and analysis process. The form includes clear instructions, and we provide the following criteria to ensure consistency across Sonoma County.

Getting Started

We recommend that you download the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment pdf form, then save it with the site's name, and then fill it out in Adobe® Acrobat®, and finally save it with the date you worked on it last. This can result in multiple copies of the form, some might even be from your collaborators, but in the end, it creates a history of the process that can be referred to if needed.

If you do not have Adobe® Acrobat® or if the pdf is acting a little finicky, another way to complete the pdf is to print it and complete it on paper and wait to fill out the pdf with assistance from Fire Safe Sonoma once you have all the necessary information.

The information below provides a chronological guide for filling out the form. The Summary and Recommendations sections should be completed *after* finishing the other pages. Fire Safe Sonoma offers templates with boilerplate text for both of these sections to ensure consistency throughout Sonoma County and to reduce the likelihood of application rejection. **You can access the *Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment form here*; the Summary template [HERE](#); and the Recommendations template [HERE](#).**

Assessment Participants Section (Page 3)

As mentioned in the **Identify Resident Leader(s)** section the first three rows are reserved for resident leaders. If there are only two, include the Fire Safe Sonoma staff in the third row. Clearly indicate the Chair of the local Firewise board or committee, as they will receive recognition materials and correspondence in the future. Use the last two rows for the local fire agency and CAL FIRE representatives who assisted and reviewed the final draft.

IMAGE ??

General Site Description Section (Page 3):

Site Name: Fire Safe Sonoma advises naming the community or geography similarly to a fire incident, like the Hollydale, Canyon Terrace (HCT) Firewise Community, or the Gericke Road Firewise Community. Ensure this name matches the one listed on the Firewise Site Profile in the Firewise USA Portal.

Boundary: Use road names to describe the boundary. For example, “The site is bordered by Nasau St to the north, Julie Rd to the east, Angles St to the south and Randi Rd to the west.”

Area: If unknown by the resident leader(s), Fire Safe Sonoma staff can help communities estimate the area of the community.

General Site Information Section (Page 4):

Number of dwelling units and residents: Fire Safe Sonoma staff can estimate the number of dwelling units in your area. Utilizing our tools, we can generate a spreadsheet that distinguishes between dwellings and vacant or agricultural land. By applying the Sonoma County census figure of 2.5 persons per household, the population can be determined. This method ensures consistency in the program. It is important to verify that the number of dwelling units on the form matches the information in your community’s Firewise portal before submitting your application for recognition.

Description of Properties within the Boundary Section (Page 4)

The form contains data collected from the Firewise Community Risk Assessment Survey. Use that data to complete this section.

Description of local wildland fire characteristics Section (Page 4)

Common vegetation types: Fire Safe Sonoma staff can help communities accurately determine the percentages of the various vegetation types in the area. There is limited space, so be brief.

Provide example and/or include a Veg map image???

Topography: Community members know this information the best. You can describe the topography in regards to the feature being to the north, east, south, or west of the community.

Provide example??

Observations Section (Page 5-7)

Assessing home and defensible space conditions is crucial for risk assessment. This section is populated with information obtained from the **SURVEY**. For the most part, you simply pull the survey results from the survey and put them here.

A NOTE ABOUT THE DEFENSIBLE SPACE SECTION OF THE COMMUNITY SURVEY:

Due to the nature of the questions, the Firewise USA® Community Survey we use will not align perfectly with the defensible space questions on the Firewise USA® Community Wildfire Risk Assessment form. To address this, Fire Safe Sonoma provides a Data Conversion Table that summarizes survey data from the community survey into the check-box responses needed for the Risk Assessment form.

Here is a link to that tool:

Summary Section (Page 8)

The Summary Section might be daunting because you are faced with a blank page. We all are prone to “writer’s block”, right? If this is the case, Fire Safe Sonoma recommends that you use our Microsoft® Word fillable Summary Section template with boilerplate text, dropdowns, and fields making it easy to complete using the Community Survey data, and then this can be copied and pasted into the **form**. Fire Safe Sonoma staff can provide instructions on how to do this. Using this template also helps to maintain consistency among all of the Firewise USA® sites in Sonoma County. **You can access the Summary Section template HERE [linktree???](#).**

Recommendations Section (Page 9)

The assessment process collects information to develop recommendations in the Recommendations section of the *Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment*. These recommendations help create a prioritized list of risk reduction projects listed in the site's California Required 3-Year Action Plan.

Fire Safe Sonoma has developed a Recommendations Section template that is similar to the Summary Section but not as constraining. This template also offers boilerplate text only and the document is fully editable. **You can access the Recommendations template HERE.**

Completing the California Required 3-Year Action Plan

A NOTE ABOUT THE ACTION PLAN:

*The **California Required 3-Year Action Plan** is a prioritized list of **projects, actions and activities** for the participating site, along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years. Action plans also highlight suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years.*

Using the findings from the Recommendations section (located **on page 9** of the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment), the resident leader(s) and board/committee, in collaboration with the local fire agency and/or Fire Safe Sonoma if warranted, will identify actions and steps that can be taken to reduce the site's risk from wildfire and list them as **projects, actions or activities** in the *California Required 3-Year Action Plan template*.

Prioritization should be based on the threat of a wildfire to homes, addressing hazards at the dwelling first and then in the three home ignition zones (*Immediate, Intermediate and Extended*). Small actions can significantly improve home survivability.

These projects, actions or activities can include communitywide investments along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years. This inclusion can provide you and your community with peace of mind that experienced recommendations are focusing your community's time and efforts.

CAL FIRE requires the use of their California Required 3-Year Action Plan template (which includes the CAL FIRE logo) rather than the Firewise USA® Action Plan. The California Required 3-Year Action Plan is organized by year and outlines the key objectives the community would like to complete for each of the following topical areas:

- 🔥 Education and Outreach Goals
- 🔥 Home Hardening Goals
- 🔥 Defensible Space / Fuel Reduction Goals
- 🔥 Evacuation Planning (Ex. Preparedness and Routing) and Wildfire Preparedness

Keeping these topical areas in mind, it helps to list projects, actions or activities that are likely to be significant success and projects, actions or activities where improvements could be made, especially at low cost with sweat equity/volunteer labor. Regarding defensible space, of the three home ignition zones emphasis should be on the immediate zone. However, of the three home ignition zones (*Immediate, Intermediate and Extended*), emphasis should almost always be on the immediate zone.

Writing the Action Plan Objectives

Each project, action or activity should be written as a **SMART Objective**. A SMART objective is a goal that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART). This framework helps ensure that goals are clear, attainable, and progress can be tracked effectively. Each element of the action plan should have at least three projects, actions or activities – so over the three-year plan there would be at least 36 projects, actions or activities. (*Four elements per year with three projects, actions or activities in each element = 12; times three years = 36.*) Some can be ongoing or continuing if a single project, action or activity is meant to take place over multiple years.

In the context of writing each Action Plan Objective, keep in mind that an objective is a broad, overarching aim or desired outcome, while a task is a specific action or step taken to achieve that objective. Objectives define what you want to accomplish, while tasks outline how you will get there and would be included in a fully developed project design.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- Objective:
 - A broader, more strategic statement of what you want to achieve.
 - Often described as a long-term or overarching goal.
 - SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) should be used.
 - Example: "Between July 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025, complete between 30 and 100 feet of roadside fuels reduction on each side of a three-mile section of Smith Ranch Road between 18510 and 18819 Smith Ranch Road."
- Task:
 - A specific action or activity that contributes to achieving an objective.
 - More concrete and actionable than objectives.
 - Example: "Contact residents along Smith Ranch Road and obtain permission to conduct fuels reduction work."

In essence, objectives provide the "why" and tasks provide the "how".

Relationship between Objectives and Tasks:

- Tasks are smaller, more manageable parts of a larger objective.
- In a fully developed project, objectives are further broken down into a series of tasks.
- Completing tasks contributes to the overall achievement of the objective.

Think of it like building a house. The objective is to "build a house". Tasks would be things like "lay the foundation," "frame the walls," "install plumbing," etc. Each task is a step towards the final objective of having a completed house.

SAMPLE SMART OBJECTIVE:

To improve evacuation and firefighter access, and slow wildfire spread, between July 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, we will complete between 30 and 100 feet of roadside fuels reduction on each side of a three-mile section of Smith Ranch Road between 18510 and 18819 Smith Ranch Road."

It is a good idea to make sure that all projects, actions and activities undertaken by the board/committee are assigned to an individual or group of individuals to ensure that there

is someone responsible for follow-up. As the projects, actions and activities are being considered, ask for volunteers to take ownership of specific projects they may be interested in. Some board/committee members may have a special interest in specific projects or may be able to commit certain resources. Be encouraging, as some members may be shy or hesitant because this is a new area of knowledge for them.

Remember that defensible space is required at all times for all buildings and structures within California's State Responsibility Area under Public Resource Code 4291 and for Local Governments with designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones under Government Code 51182.

Also, as part of the annual **renewal process** communities *must* work with neighbors on addressing items within the action plan *and host one outreach event per year* as required by Firewise USA® so this should always be included in the California Required 3-Year Action Plan.

A NOTE ABOUT PROPERTY OWNER PERMISSIONS:

For community-scale projects, one of the most difficult tasks to complete is obtaining the permission from property owners within the site to allow contractors to do the work on the property. If this is a necessary task within an Action Plan objective, keep in mind that this task will require a lot of resources such as time (length of time to complete the task), labor (both volunteer for outreach and canvassing etc. as well as contract labor), and funds (costs of direct mail, social media posts, etc. to get the property owners inspired to collaborate).

The California Required 3-Year Action Plan is updated every three years but may need more frequent updates due to changing circumstances like fires, natural disasters, or new construction. The action plan must be uploaded as a PDF to the application and remains valid until the next update cycle.

After completing the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment, and the California Required 3-Year Action Plan, an accounting of the **annual community investment** must be completed for the 12 months leading up to the application date. Note that this goal is automatically calculated in the Firewise USA® Application Portal and if not met the application will not be accepted. We will go into this in the next Section.

DOING

DOING GOAL: *Complete educational and risk reduction actions identified in the Action Plan. Goals for this plan must be related to the “Recommendations” located on page 9 for the Firewise USA Risk Assessment document.*

Calculate Annual Community Investment

The **annual community investment** is the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in wildfire risk reduction actions. For example, if your site has identified 100 homes within its boundary, then 100 hours of work, or the monetary equivalent, based on the independent sector value of volunteer time, needs to be completed for that year.

This does not mean that every single person within the site’s boundary must contribute to this obligation. It simply means that the **annual community investment amount** of the site **is equal to** one hour per household / dwelling. For example, if there are 100 dwellings within the site, and the current dollar value equivalent of one volunteer hour is \$33.49 (as determined by the Independent Sector) then the **annual community investment amount obligation would be \$3,349.00.**

Remember that the obligation amount is based on the value in volunteer time -but the actual contributed *effort* can include cash, equipment costs, in-kind services, and rental costs, **in addition to the volunteer hours.**

HOW THE VOLUNTEER IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION IS DETERMINED:

The rate per volunteer hour is determined by the **Independent Sector**, a national membership organization that brings together a diverse community of changemakers, nonprofits, foundations, and corporations working to strengthen civil society and ensure all people in the United States thrive. To learn more here is a link: [https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/#:~:text=\\$33.49,the%20value%20of%20volunteer%20time](https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/#:~:text=$33.49,the%20value%20of%20volunteer%20time).

Calculating Annual Community Investment Example

Given that the **annual community investment amount** of a site equates to the total value of one-hour volunteer time (as set by the *Independent Sector*) per dwelling unit, calculating the **annual community investment amount** required for a site is simple. Simply take the number of *dwellings* within the site, and multiply that by the current volunteer hourly rate. For example, if the site has 100 dwellings, and the current volunteer

hourly rate is \$33.49, then the **annual community investment amount** would be \$3,349.00.

To take the example further, let's do a word problem. Imagine that within the annual reporting period the site held their annual educational outreach event or activity, and the board/committee members logged hours towards that event as follows: Eight hours of prep work for 2 members (=16 hrs.); 2 members worked the 4-hour long event (= 8 hrs.), and 2 members spent 2 hours each taking care of post event work (= 4 hrs.). Let's also say that 10 residents from within the site's geography spent an hour each attending the event (= 10 hrs.).

This brings the total to 38 hours towards the **annual community investment amount** requirement, or using the volunteer hourly rate of \$33.49 per hour, a total **annual community investment amount** of \$1,272.62 that goes toward the **annual community investment amount** requirement.

Now add to this the \$1000.00 spent on materials for the event and the new total is \$2,272.62. In this case we have already reached 68%, of the **annual community investment amount**.

If a state or federal agency or municipal department contributes cash, personnel time or equipment to a local project, ensure that the investment is included in the total **annual community investment** for the community.

APPLICATION YEAR INVESTMENT – ARGUMENT FOR LESS THAN 100%

Given that in 2008, the initial investment amount for Firewise USA® was at least \$2 per capita in Firewise projects. (Ref: A User Reference Guide to the Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program; Copyright © 2009 NFPA).

And given that in 2008, the Independent Sector estimated the dollar value of a volunteer hour in California at \$23.42. And given that \$2.00 is 9% of \$23.42.

Then, in 2025, with a volunteer rate of \$33.49, the initial community investment should be at least \$2.89 per capita. ($\$33.49 \times 9\% = \2.98) Or \$298.00 for a community with 100 dwellings.

Collecting the Initial Community Investment Data

Once you know what the annual community investment obligation amount is, you will need to look back and determine what was done in the community over the past twelve months related to the Recommendations section of the Firewise USA® Recognition Program Community Wildfire Risk Assessment that can count towards this obligation. In the case of "sweat equity" the information can be estimated with informal documentation. However, if a monetary investment is being used, receipts or other forms of

documentation that connects the costs of the work to the wildfire safety and risk reduction effort should be collected and archived. Most sites can easily obtain information on what work has already been done, and most sites easily meet this requirement.

A NOTE ABOUT THE INITIAL COMMUNITY INVESTMENT:

*While the **annual community investment amount** can include cash, equipment costs, in-kind services, rental costs, in addition to volunteer hours, **CAL FIRE likes to see a significant amount of sweat equity investment in the first year.***

Remember, this goal is automatically calculated in the Firewise USA® Application Portal and if not met the application will not be accepted. If you are having difficulty meeting the annual community investment obligation, contact Fire Safe Sonoma for assistance.

TELLING

TELLING GOAL: *When the above criteria have been met, the Resident Leader applies for recognition through the Firewise® Portal (portal.firewise.org), describing educational and mitigation work in the site. Each year, sites renew their status by reporting their activity*

Before completing the next step of creating a Firewise USA® account and site profile in the Firewise USA® Portal, it is imperative that both the CAL FIRE and local fire agency representative review the draft Risk Assessment and Action Plan. Once it has been reviewed, and approved by the fire agency representatives, you may begin the online submission.

Create a Firewise USA® Account and Site Profile

Please follow the steps below to first create a Firewise USA® account then create your Site Profile (aka Firewise application) for your Firewise community. You must create a Firewise USA® account before creating a Site Profile or before being added to an already existing Firewise Site Profile.

Creating a Firewise USA® Account

Step 1. Go to portal.firewise.org/user/login to create a Firewise USA account. You must create an account first before you can start your Firewise application.

Step 2. Click on "CREATE ACCOUNT".

IMAGE

Step 3. Fill out the required information on the "Welcome, Let's Get Started" page to create your account. Write down your password on a separate notepad in case you need it later. When asked about your "Industry" or "Job Function" it is okay to select "other".

IMAGE

Step 4. After you input all your information, click "Register" at the bottom of the page.

Once you have created a site, Fire Safe Sonoma will be alerted that there is a new site in Sonoma County and a Fire Safe Sonoma staff member should be reaching out to you to help you with the process. Once a site is created, you should see the name and email address of the staff member assigned to Firewise in Sonoma County under the Regional Coordinators label.

Basic Information

In order to update your community's Resident Leaders and Regional Coordinators, please use the Manage Contacts form.

Resident Leaders
 Larry Hooper
 [Redacted]

Regional Coordinators
 Marika Ramsden
 Marika@firesafesonoma.org

MANAGE CONTACTS

State Representatives

Malcolm Kennedy
 malcolm.kennedy@fire.ca.gov
 5303605291

Need Firewise Materials?

Click the link below to order Firewise Materials. Our materials are an excellent resource on Wildfire Safety.

ORDER MATERIALS

Creating a Firewise USA® Site Profile (Firewise Application)

The Firewise USA Site Profile is where resident leaders will submit their Firewise application for the community. Only ONE Site Profile (aka application) can be created per community. If there are multiple people helping submit the application, then one person should start the Site Profile and then add other members to the Site Profile to help fill in the application.

You can start your Site Profile and work on it over time. You do not need to have everything completed before starting the application. The only thing you need to start a Site Profile is the name of the community. **Please revisit the section on naming the site before committing to the site name in the Portal!** While this can be changed later, the change has to be made by the National Firewise Coordinator and cannot be changed by you or the Fire Safe Sonoma Regional Coordinator.

Step 1: After you create your account log in at portal.firewise.org/user/login. Click "FIREWISE LOGIN".

IMAGE

Step 2: Click on "CREATE NEW SITE".

Step 3: Map Your Site. Firewise just needs the general location of your community, so you do not need to know the exact boundaries of your community yet. Additionally, you do not need to add your address or drop the pin on your home if you do not want to.

Instead you can click on the map to have the pin drop in a community common space, in the road, or some other place within your neighborhood. Once you have identified the general location of your community, click “CREATE NEW SITE”.

Step 4: Tell Us More.

- 🔥 **Question 1. What’s your role?:** Your answer: Resident Leader - I will be managing my site at the local level.
- 🔥 **Question 2. Do you have a regional coordinator helping you?** Your answer: “Yes”
- 🔥 **Question 3. Regional Coordinators Email, submit:**
marika@firesafesonoma.org or boardpresident@firesafesonoma.org.
- 🔥 **Question 4. Name of your Firewise Site:** Pick a name for your site with your participating members. Keep in mind that this is the ONLY feature of the application that you yourself cannot change after starting the application. **Please revisit the section on naming the site before committing to the site name in the Portal!** The site name can only be changed by the National Firewise coordinator, who will have to be emailed to make the change.
- 🔥 **Question 5. How many dwelling units are in the boundary of your Firewise Site?** An estimate at this time is okay if you are jumping the gun and your community boundary is not finalized yet. This number *can* be changed later after your community boundary *is* finalized later in the application process.
- 🔥 **Question 6. How many residents live within the boundaries of your site?** (Optional) Again, an estimate is fine, and you can change this information later in the application. In Sonoma County there is an average of 2.5 people per household.
- 🔥 **Question 7. Share your site website.** (Optional). Leave blank if your community does not have a website. Fire Safe Sonoma may add a link to the Firewise sites on the Fire Safe Sonoma by default.
- 🔥 **Question 8.** How did you hear about the Firewise Program? (Optional)
- 🔥 **Question 9.** Select a background for the site Dashboard. (Optional) If you select Yes, you can navigate to a photo to add to your Site Profile. You can also add a photo later if you wish, but you do not need a background for the site Dashboard.

Next click **CONTINUE** at the bottom of the page.

Step 5: Site Contact Information. Choose “Use my contact information”, which means they will use the information you input when you made your Firewise account.

IMAGE

Step 6: Review. Review all information you provided. If needed, edit your information. After reviewing your information and clicking submit, you will receive a welcome email from Firewise USA. The Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council Coordinator’s will also

get an email that a site was created and will automatically be able to view and edit the application.

Congratulations you have created an account and a Firewise USA site! **The next step is to populate it with the risk analysis data.**

Add info about celebrating the success from old FW user guide.....

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ANNUAL RENEWAL

RENEWAL GOAL: *Each year, neighbors complete educational and risk reduction actions identified in the plan. These go towards your site's annual reporting efforts.*

In order to remain “In Good Standing” in the program, participating sites will need to complete an annual renewal application. This application is typically due mid-November. Requirements are similar to the initial application for recognition.

Annual renewal of a community's commitment to Firewise activity is essential for the Firewise USA® Recognition Program. Documenting ongoing activities reinforces wildfire safety behavior, making Firewise practices routine. Continuous action is crucial to maintain fire safety due to vegetation regrowth, debris accumulation, and aging homes. Single-season activities have minimal long-term impact, so sustained efforts are necessary for communities to effectively embrace Firewise changes.

To the best of the site's ability, the actions identified in each of the four elements of the Action Plan should be completed to satisfy annual participation. Examples might include hosting community education workshops, distributing materials by print (or digitally), and organizing a Firewise Day. Document the volunteer hours throughout the year.

Remember, each site is required to invest one volunteer hour per dwelling unit annually. For example, a site with 100 homes would need 100 volunteer hours or the monetary equivalent for costs incurred. Annual investment can be reported in either hours worked or money spent. Fire Safe Sonoma offers tools to help track this annual community investment.

VEGETATION REMOVAL IS A MUST!

A major component of wildfire risk reduction that must be included is the removal of vegetation (shrubs, brush, limbs, trees, etc.) from individual properties and common-area property. Tracking vegetation removal provides State and local fire agencies with information on the quantity of potential wildfire fuel that's been eliminated from the area(s).

[Find examples \(PDF\) of activities that count towards your investment.](#)

Fire Safe Sonoma will begin reminding current communities about mid-year that they need to think about renewal, and more frequent reminders occur as the year goes on. Fire Safe Sonoma can work with resident leaders to submit renewal forms on a timely

basis. As mentioned earlier, the renewal is typically due mid-November and the requirements are similar to the initial application for recognition.

Don't forget, each participating site is required to hold a minimum of one wildfire risk reduction educational outreach event or activity annually – don't forget to include this investment! **Examples of acceptable events can be found in that section of the PORTAL.**

Fire Safe Sonoma (OR Portal?) has created an online tool to help a community estimate its vegetation removal in cubic yards. (Ref Step 6)

Use our [volunteer hourly worksheet \(PDF\)](#) to collect information from residents in your community

A REMINDER ABOUT PROPERTY OWNER PERMISSIONS:

For community-scale projects, one of the most difficult tasks to complete is obtaining the permission from property owners within the site to allow contractors to do the work on the property. If this is a necessary task within an Action Plan objective, keep in mind that this task will require a lot of resources such as time (length of time to complete the task), labor (both volunteer for outreach and canvassing etc. as well as contract labor), and funds (costs of direct mail, social media posts, etc. to get the property owners inspired to collaborate).

FINAL NOTES

Wildfire protection requires collective effort. In California, residents are forming Firewise USA® Communities to reduce wildfire risks. These grassroots organizations help protect homes and environments from wildfires. Often initiated by a recent fire or proactive neighbors, these communities turn interest into action, empowering residents to enhance safety.

Firewise USA® Communities in California educate homeowners on wildfire preparedness and collaborate with local fire officials to enhance community wildfire

survivability. They implement projects like hazardous-fuel reduction, Community Wildfire Protection Planning, and homeowner training.

Firewise USA® Communities mobilize individuals at highest risk, forming a robust group initiative that aims to:

- 🔥 Minimize hazards to life, homes, and both natural and human-made resources.
- 🔥 Enhance property insurability by bolstering community safety.
- 🔥 Establish strong collaborations with first responders.
- 🔥 Secure resources to support fire prevention endeavors.

Together, we can achieve these goals effectively.

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