
Our View: Clear-and-present danger? Yes and no

Just about seven years ago the sky above Truckee and the North Shore was dark with smoke for a solid week.

That was due to what was then a clear-and-present danger — the Martis Fire. For the past three weeks, we've been breathing in smoke from any number of wildfires burning to the west and north. They haven't — and currently aren't — threatening us here in Truckee-Tahoe, but the fallout is, literally, a stinging reminder that all it takes is one spark and we'll be dealing with a lot more than smoke.

If you weren't here for the Martis Fire, all you need to do is gaze upon the 15,000 acres of Mount Rose's foothills that were left burnt and barren to begin to fathom the ferocity of that blaze. With another fire season — and this year, smoke — upon us, there shouldn't be any question whether making your property fire safe is a priority.

Yet even today, after last summer's Angora and Washoe fires, a drive through any neighborhood on the North Shore and Truckee will uncover at least a few homes that won't stand a chance in a wildfire. Too much brush under trees too close to homes.

In the event of a wildfire — yes, there will be another big one sooner, later and closer — houses without defensible space will be passed up by firefighters who look for homes that have a chance to be saved.

According to a study by the University of Nevada, Reno, a home with 101 feet of defensible space or more and a fire resistant roof has .7 percent chance of burning in a wildfire. A home with the same roof, but with only 30 feet or less of defensible space, has a 24 percent chance of going up in flames.

That's one of the reasons California has extended defensible space clearances around homes and structures from 30 feet to 100 feet.

The law doesn't mean each home must now have a 100-foot circle of dirt around it. Instead, state fire officials want us to think in zones.

Zone 1 is 30 feet around your home and has no dead grass, pine needles or brush.

Keep your roof clear of pine needles, leaves or dead branches from trees. Install a green belt such as lawn or firesafe landscaping.

Zone 2 is 70 feet out. This area needs to be kept "lean and green." Trees and plants may remain but need to be free of undergrowth. Densely crowded stands of trees or brush need to be thinned out.

If wildfire isn't on your mind, it should be. All you need to do is take a deep breath.

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