

Stipends available to fund defensible space in basin

By Julie Brown
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Close to \$1 million will be available to Lake Tahoe homeowners this summer to assist with the sometimes burdensome cost of carrying out defensible space.

The Nevada Fire Safe Council is funding the stipends from Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act money allocated to Lake Tahoe.

The stipends will cover 50 percent of the total defensible space cost, up to \$1,000.

But only a certain number of stipends are available, said Jessica Mahnken, project coordinator for the Nevada Fire Safe Council.

The council will be allocating the funds in various increments among the fire districts in the Tahoe Basin. The North Tahoe Fire Protection District has \$193,000, or 193 stipends, for homeowners within their boundaries, and \$96,000 was allocated to the Meeks Bay Fire Protection District.

"I think everyone is going to use their own (stipend allocations) up," Mahnken said. "Everyone is short right now, it seems."

How to get your stipend, in five steps

1. Contact your local fire district to get your home inspected for defensible space.
2. Contact the Nevada Fire Safe Council for a voucher that will reserve your stipend for 45 days until the defensible-space work is complete.
3. Get your home fire safe. Hire a contractor or a landscaper and fulfill the prescription given to you by your local fire district. Everything must be completed or you will not receive your stipend.
4. Contact the Nevada Fire Safe Council for a rebate evaluation. The council will ensure that the prescribed defensible-space work is complete.
5. Get your rebate. Stipends will cover 50 percent of the cost to complete your defensible space, up to \$1,000.

- Source: The Nevada Fire Safe Council, www.nvfsc.org or (877) LT-NVFSC

The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department is not receiving money for the stipends through this round of lands act funding but is expecting funds next year, according to Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti. Meanwhile, homeowners in need of assistance can contact the fire department at (530) 542-6180, and their situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The Tahoe Douglas and Lake Valley fire protection districts are receiving funds for the stipends, Gigliotti said.

The stipends, fire officials said, are a great opportunity for homeowners.

"We think (the stipends) are one of the best things we've been able to take on, and we certainly hope that all 96 are used up," said Chief John Pang of the Meeks Bay Fire Protection District. "(Defensible space) can be very costly. It can be time-consuming. But it's good sweat equity to help protect your home."

Chief Duane Whitelaw of the North Tahoe Fire Protection District said the stipends will offer relief to homeowners facing a costly invoice to fulfill their defensible-space prescription.

"We realize it's an expensive undertaking," Whitelaw said. "We, the fire districts, all pushed hard for this stipend to get approved. And it did."

But fire officials warned that the limited number of stipends will go fast.

"I want to encourage anyone who believes they're qualified to get their name in to the fire-safe council as soon as possible, because the funds will not last throughout the fire season," Whitelaw said.

Homeowners who are interested in applying for a stipend need to contact their local fire district first to have their property inspected. After the inspection, they should call the Nevada Fire Safe Council offices to receive a voucher, which will reserve the maximum \$1,000 for 45 days until the work is completed.

The fire districts are available to inspect homes and prescribe defensible-space procedures.

Whitelaw also recommended homeowners refer to the "Living With Fire" guidelines, which will be mailed to every homeowner in the North Tahoe Fire Protection District, for details on defensible-space requirements. Copies are also available at local fire stations.

"We really see the 'Living With Fire' document ... as the bible for defensible space in the Tahoe Basin," Whitelaw said.