



# FIRE SAFE COUNCIL HANDBOOK

## Why Does Your Community Need A Fire Safe Council?

Enticed by secluded settings and beautiful vistas, California's population has soared in the last 40 years. Suburbanization has pushed communities into the wildland-urban interface, blurring the boundaries between cities and nature.

When we choose to live among nature, we must learn to live with fire. 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. Fire is a fact of life in California.

Learning to live with fire means protecting our community assets from potential wildfire damage. That's what a Fire Safe Council 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

## Local Councils In Action

Over 140 local councils in California have made their communities safer, better places to live by:

- Developing an emergency preparedness plan for the community before a wildfire occurs. This proactive measure minimizes loss of life, property, homes, businesses, natural and historic areas, and other valuable assets at risk of being destroyed by wildfire.
- Providing an opportunity for community residents and organizations to voice concerns about public safety issues, and protect social and economic interests in the community.
- Increasing the chances that homes in the community will continue to be insured. Insurance companies assess the potential liability of a community's ability to survive a wildfire *before* writing insurance policies. They know your community's fire risk. In

some areas, Fire Safe Councils have actually involved insurers in increasing community safety, which has resulted in continued commitments by insurance companies to keep their book of business in town.

## **SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE**

A Fire Safe Council is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. Councils are dedicated to saving lives and reducing fire losses by making their communities fire safe. Towns, regional areas and counties all have formed Fire Safe Councils.

### **Statewide Fire Safe Council – the Model**

*Goal:* Preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. The Council works to meet this goal by combining the expertise, resources and distribution channels of its members.

*Formed:* April 1993, the Council has united its diverse membership to speak with one voice about fire safety.

#### *Accomplishments:*

- Distributed fire safe education materials to industry leaders and their constituents
  - The Allstate Foundation awarded the Fire Safe Council grants to provide local communities with guidance on how to plan and implement pre-fire management projects to reduce the risk of wildfire.
  - The California FAIR Plan provided a \$25,000 contribution to buy advertising time for a fire safe public service announcement to be distributed to California media in 1997.
  - California Farm Bureau Federation has run extensive fire prevention stories in several internal publications and through its statewide radio network.
  - California Association of Nurserymen distributed "Fire Safe Inside and Out" videos and brochures to all nurseries in Laguna, Malibu and Altadena following the 1993 fires.
  - American Insurance Association helped secure actor Tom Selleck to film a series of TV and radio public service announcements and secured a \$75,000 contribution from California FAIR Plan to buy advertising time for the Selleck TV spots.
  - Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction funded a full-page insert in USA TODAY using artwork and information from "Fire Safe Inside and Out."
  - Various members lent their support of "The Burning Season" documentary by The Weather Channel.
  - PG&E has conducted many fire prevention programs, including a print advertisement campaign and hazard tree removal programs.

- Evaluated legislation and policies pertaining to fire safety
  - Bates Bill and countless others.
  - California Association of Realtors amended the property disclosure section of a real estate form used in 80-90 percent of all transactions statewide to require sellers to disclose wildfire severity information about property in state responsibility areas under certain conditions.
  - In June 1997 the Council co-sponsored with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) and the Society of American Foresters a partnership summit for leaders of key public and private agencies to forward public-private partnership initiatives to reduce the costs and losses of damaging wildfires.
  - Member experts spoke at numerous League of Cities, California State Association of Counties, Western Governor's Association, California Landscape Contractors' Association, National Fire Protection Association, American Society of Landscape Architects, Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction, and many other conferences.
- Helped form dozens of local councils
- A council in virtually every California county!

**Is a Fire Safe Council right for your community?**

**If your goal is to increase the safety of residents, and better protect homes and businesses from fire, then the answer is YES!**

**STARTING A COUNCIL**

**Membership Recruitment**

Your first step is to recruit members. First, identify the potential public and private partners in your community who are at risk of loss from wildfire. Here are some examples of potential members:

- **The Fire Department** can provide advice and expertise on fire safety.
- **Utilities**, such as the water district or the electric company, have a vested interest in fire safety because their services may be disrupted when a fire occurs. The electric company is especially concerned about trees growing into power lines and starting fires.
- **Environmental Groups** are especially concerned about habitat loss for endangered species when fires occur, as well as a number of other fire-related issues.
- **Insurance Industry Representatives** are interested in insuring and continuing to

insure communities that have taken fire safety measures.

- **Landscapers** can provide information on fire safe landscaping and help educate homeowners about choosing more fire-resistant plants.
- **Real Estate Agents** are the first people homeowners meet when they are moving into the neighborhood. Real estate agents may educate homeowners about potential fire danger and provide information on how homeowners can protect themselves.
- **The Parks and Recreation Department** seeks to protect natural areas from damaging wildfire and may educate the community about fire's role in the ecosystem.
- **Local Political Leaders** can mobilize the community to become fire safe and represent community fire safe concerns/initiatives in government.
- **Homeowner Associations** have a vested interest in protecting their individual homes, as well as their neighborhoods, from wildfires.
- **Other Local Groups** that have a vested interest in fire safety; this could and should be just about anyone who lives or works in the area.

### **Send an Invitation**

The next step is to write a letter to each potential partner explaining the Fire Safe Council's goals and inviting them to a Fire Safe Council meeting. Here is a prototype invitation letter.

## **SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER**

NAME  
NAME OF ORGANIZATION  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear [NAME],

We are all concerned about the potentially devastating effects of wildfire on our families, our homes, businesses and neighborhoods. As we enjoy living and working in the scenic surroundings of [NAME OF COMMUNITY], we must realize that our beautiful community could be destroyed in a wildfire. To help protect ourselves from this threat and minimize our potential losses, I invite you to attend a formation meeting of the [YOUR CITY/COUNTY] Fire Safe Council.

The purpose of the meeting is to bring together public and private organizations to discuss fire safety in our community. This community-based fire safety concept was born out of the statewide Fire Safe Council whose goal is to preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. There are approximately 150 local councils throughout the state.

Our Fire Safe Council can be used as a forum to share information, solve problems and link related programs in ways that can save money and time. The public safety issues we discuss may even extend beyond fire safety, to earthquake preparedness, emergency medical response, etc.

The success of the council depends upon the willingness and participation of PEOPLE/ORGANIZATIONS like YOU/YOURS. Your participation is essential to protecting what you value most. Your views will be shared with local decision-makers, as well as private companies.

The Fire Safe Council meeting is scheduled for [DATE and TIME] at [LOCATION] in [CITY]. Attached is a brochure on the Council for your review, as a well as an overview of some of the statewide Council's accomplishments. In addition, if you'd like to explore the Council concept further, please visit the Fire Safe Council's web site at [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org).

I hope you can join us in this valuable community service. I will contact you in a few days to determine your attendance. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER]. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Best regards,

YOUR NAME  
YOUR ORGANIZATION

## **Preparing for the First Meeting**

### **Contact Local Fire Officials**

As the local fire safety experts, your fire department will have valuable insight about your community's fire environment. The department may be able to provide program ideas that will help you motivate the council to action and create some early successes.

### **Ask Fire Officials About the California Fire Plan**

The California Fire Plan outlines a strategy for how the fire department and the community can work together to minimize losses and costs from wildland fires. The facts and statistics included in the California Fire Plan will provide you with unquestionable proof of California's fire problem. It can target the specific fire risk areas in your community to help you focus the Council's efforts. It can create community support for fire safe programs. For more on the Fire Plan, visit [www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov).

### **Contact Local Fire Safe Groups**

Contacting members of other Fire Safe Councils is a good way to learn about successful grassroots fire safe programs. Access some local Council's at [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org).

### **Contact the Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau**

The Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau can make arrangements for a Fire Safe Council representative to speak to your community about the benefits of forming a Fire Safe Council. For more information, see the section of the handbook entitled, "[Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau](#)."

### **Select a Meeting Location**

Hold the first meeting in a neutral location such as the local community center or library. Try to select a meeting place where everyone will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns.

### **Create an Agenda**

Fire safety can be a complicated issue. At your first Fire Safe Council meeting, keep your agenda simple and uncomplicated. Agenda items should be broad, topical areas that can be used as starting points for productive discussions. The goal of the first meeting is to begin a dialogue and build consensus. Avoid discussing controversial, divisive topics at the first meeting.

## **Appoint a Facilitator**

Choose one person to direct the first meeting. A good facilitator has the ability to work with people and achieve consensus. The facilitator should be neutral, and understand the diverse views of members and be able to put them in the context of the larger issue. He or she should not be easily swayed by opinion and should have the ability to evaluate issues and concerns raised by members.

## **SAMPLE AGENDA FOR FIRST MEETING**



### **FIRE SAFE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA (DATE)**

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions
- III. California's Fire Problem/The California Fire Plan
  - A. Map of (NAME OF COMMUNITY/COUNTY'S) fire danger
- IV. The Fire Safe Council Concept
- V. Goals and Objectives
- VI. High Fire Hazard Areas
- VII. Fire Safe Projects
- VIII. Appointment of Executive Officers
- IX. Open Forum
- X. Next Meeting

## **At the Meeting**

### **Take Meeting Minutes**

Meeting minutes are valuable because the group can refer back to the minutes to recall the events of past meetings. This is an excellent way to keep track of new ideas and responsibilities for projects. A meeting minutes sample is provided later in the handbook. Whoever takes meeting minutes should be willing to type them up after the meeting. It may also be a good idea to mail or e-mail minutes to Council members to keep them updated.

### **Develop a Membership Roster**

Circulate an attendance sheet during the meeting and have Council members write down their names, addresses, telephone numbers and, if available, their e-mail addresses. The person taking meeting minutes should type up a Fire Safe Council roster so that members can get in touch with each other between meetings.

### **Display a Map of the Community**

The map will help the Council identify areas of concern and high fire hazard areas in the community. It will help the Council prioritize potential fire safe projects. Your fire department may be able to help create a map showing specific fire danger areas.

### **Share Fire Safety Brochures and Materials**

Your local fire department may have information it can share. And visit the Fire Safe Council's web site for brochures on fire safe landscaping, fire safety for inside and outside the home, a fire safe homeowners checklist and more. The Fire Safe Council is at [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org), or call the statewide Council at 916/447-7415 to request materials.

### **Make the Most of the Meeting**

#### **Welcome**

Greet the newly formed Council by welcoming members to the first meeting. Most of them probably have very busy schedules. They may be attending this initial meeting to determine if their membership is a good use of their time. Express gratitude for their attendance and convey a vision that this Fire Safe Council can make a difference in the community.

## **Introductions**

Ask everyone in the room to introduce themselves and their organizational affiliation. Revealing the group's diversity will allow everyone to see how wildfire affects the entire community.

## **California's Fire Problem**

The first order of business should be to explain California's fire problem. A fire safety expert, such as the fire chief, can help the group understand the role of fire in the ecosystem and how it affects your community. Ask the fire official to also discuss the California Fire Plan.

## **The Fire Safe Council Concept**

To explain the Fire Safe Council concept, consider showing the Fire Safe California Community Action video. This video explains the nature of fire and how forming a Fire Safe Council can help minimize the losses caused by devastating wildfires. The video also briefly explains the main steps to forming a Fire Safe Council. Alternatively, you may contact the Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau, 916/447-7415 and request a Fire Safe Council representative to attend the initial meeting and present the Fire Safe Council concept to the group.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The facilitator should ask Council members to list major goals and objectives. Turn the meeting into a brainstorming session by asking each participant to answer the question: "What do I want this group to accomplish?" This will help identify fire safety problems or objectives important to the group. Try posting the ideas on a board and include them in the meeting minutes.

## **High Fire Hazard Areas**

A map will help the Council identify geographic areas of concern and high fire hazard areas in the community. The Council should refer to the map to help prioritize potential fire safe projects. The Council should not only consider existing neighborhoods, but also look at business districts and areas of planned residential and commercial development that are near forest or wildland. The Council should also identify the community's assets at risk -- all the people, places, natural resources and other assets that need protection from wildfire.

## **Fire Safe Projects**

Identify projects the Council can accomplish and assign oversight responsibility to members. The person or group will provide progress reports to the Council at future

meetings or ask for further assistance, if necessary. The project should be put into a time frame with a target date of completion.

### *Ideas*

- **Chipper Days**

The Mission Viejo Fire Safe Council identified a specific neighborhood needing brush fire clearance. It arranged for green waste to be collected, chipped and recycled after homeowners cleared the brush. One of the Council members donated a chipper to do the work.

- **Fire Safe Demonstration Garden**

FireSafe San Diego built a firesafe demonstration garden at a community fair and won awards for the display. The Mission Viejo Fire Safe Council created a permanent garden next to the city's library.

- **Community Arson Watch Program**

Similar to the neighborhood watch program that monitors crime, the arson watch program monitors suspicious behavior on high fire risk days, defined by your local fire department. FireSafe San Diego volunteers patrol the area for arsonists on severe fire weather days.

### **Appointment of Executive Officers**

Typically, executive officers include a chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer and secretary. However, many councils have designated only a chair and co-chair. Your council should determine the leadership it feels most comfortable with.

### **Open Forum**

Give Council members the opportunity to make announcements or raise issues that were not addressed in another area of the agenda.

### **Next Meeting**

Set a date. Do not postpone setting a date and then contact all the participants later. Since everyone is at one location at the current meeting, this is the best time to announce a date. You may want to secure the location and some potential dates for the next meeting *beforehand* to make scheduling easier. Over time, consider setting a meeting schedule for the year or assigning a constant, specific meeting date. (e.g. the third Tuesday of each month).

## **SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES**

### **Santa Barbara South Coast Fire Safe Council Meeting Minutes**

Date:

Place: Montecito Fire Protection District Headquarters

Time: 8:30 a.m.

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 08:40

#### **2. ATTENDANCE**

Ted Adams	Wildland Residents Association
Jan Atkins	Santa Barbara Association of Realtors
Jon Bastian	American Red Cross
Michael Bill	Montecito Trails Foundation
Mary Blair	Los Padres National Forest
Michael Bloomenfeld	Art Engineering Company
Kevin Buckley	Graphic, Sign and Image Design
Salud Carbajal	Board of Supervisors, 1st District
Henry Childs	Mountain Drive Volunteer Fire Department
Scott Coffman	Carpinteria-Summerland Fire
Ted Drake	Windermere Ranch
Roy Dugger	American Red Cross
Dan Eidelson	Montecito Association
Sheri Eiker-Wiles	SEWA
Kathy Good	Los Padres National Forest
Colleen Haggerty	Senator Dianne Feinstein's Office
Skip Harkson	MTO Journal/Pitts and Backman
Charlie Johnson	Santa Barbara County Fire
Dick Joy	Joy Equipment
Thadius King	Santa Barbara County Fire
Warner McGrew	Santa Barbara City Fire
Don Oaks	Santa Barbara County Fire
Marc Phillips	President AIA Santa Barbara
Bonnie Raisin	Santa Barbara Association of Realtors
Guy Rivera	American Guarantee Mortgage
Richard Rojas	State Parks/Channel Coast District
Cindy-Orin Sage	Sage Associates

Damaris Sholes  
Rachel Tierney  
Curtis Vincent  
Bendy White

MERRAG  
Biologist  
Montecito Fire Protection District  
Land Use Consultant

### 3. FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

Richard Rojas reported that a check for \$150 was received from Channel Coast Natural History Assoc. He also reported that work is being done to prepare the materials necessary for obtaining 501(c) 3 status such as by-laws and articles of incorporation. An application must be filed for exempt status. It will be important to hold a first meeting of the Board of Directors which is in the process of being established. There will be five positions: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and a member-at-large. A ballot form was distributed and council members were asked to recommend seven names on this form. Those who receive the majority votes will be contacted regarding their willingness to serve. Once the final five are elected, the first board meeting will be held. Scott Coffman suggested that those not present at the meeting also receive the ballot by mail so that all members of the council will have the opportunity to vote. There was some question about having the current membership elect the board before the definition of membership is formally defined. It was decided that the initial board elections would happen now and the issue of defining the membership would be addressed as soon as possible.

A motion was made to establish that the voting membership consists of persons on the most current mailing list dated August 15 who have attended at least three meetings. The motion was amended to include the approval of the by-laws as submitted on August 21 (H. Childs moved and S. Coffman seconded). The motion carried.

There was some discussion about the schedule and frequency of meetings once the board is elected. It was also suggested that a distinction be made between public and private sector members.

Curtis Vincent presented a current budget reporting that \$602.58 has been deposited. A total of 27 people have contributed. Mr. Vincent thanked everyone who has participated in fundraising activities.

Bonnie Raisin asked if there will be a minimum financial contribution required from members that will be specifically listed in either the by-laws or articles of incorporation. There is no specific amount listed as of now but that issue will be determined at a later date.

### 4. FIRE SAFE COUNCIL EDUCATIONAL TRAINING

Topic: Incident Command System & Standard Emergency Management System

Warner McGrew spoke about the Incident Command System & Standard Emergency Management System and gave some history regarding this system. The system is a national, all-risk system and has functioned very well locally. He gave an overview of the system using the latest field operations guide.

## 5. PREVENTION ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

Warner McGrew reported that the Prevention Action Committee met recently. A set of goals was created. It was determined that a short-term vegetation mitigation project will be sought that will accomplish some immediate goals in the area of clearing brush and creating an evacuation area. South Coast Fire agencies are being polled to determine what project will be chosen. Some intermediate and long term projects were considered. There is potential to obtain grant funds to achieve these projects.

There was some discussion about using PSAs and other methods of informing the public to increase prevention. There was also discussion about creating a system of accountability of fire prevention in the region. It was suggested that a clearing program be investigated utilizing local ranchers.

## 6. PUBLIC AFFAIRS/EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Curtis Vincent reported that Katie Lynn has unfortunately had to resign from the Public Affairs/Education Committee. Mary Blair reported that work is being done on a logo. As soon as a decision is made regarding a final logo, media packets may be created. Votes were taken regarding the final logo. Printed materials and tapes regarding fire safety were made available. Members were encouraged to view the videos. There was also a suggestion to make the tapes available to local schools. Ms. Blair discussed the need for fire terminology for the media and distributed database information regarding vegetation age class. Other efforts through UCSB are being made to access and compile vegetation age class in the area.

The committee is working on PSAs and a possible video in the future. Charlie Johnson is trying to arrange a meeting with John Palmenteri of KEYT.

Ms. Blair suggested holding a general meeting on-site at Camino Cielo. Mr. Johnson also mentioned that members will be notified of the next controlled burn in case anyone from the council would like to be present. Midland School is planning a controlled burn in the near future. It was suggested by Don Oaks that the recent Lompoc/Buellton fire be used to showcase prevention elements that were or were not addressed.

There was discussion about property owners conforming to building permit requirements targeted at fire safety. Henry Childs suggested a building inspector be invited to join the Fire Safe Council. Thadius King noted that Santa Barbara County Fire has made headway with education directly to homeowners. The Fire Safe Council is positioned to initiate a similar education process.

## 7. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The next meeting will be Thursday, September 18, at 8:30 a.m. at the Montecito Fire Protection District.

Roy Dugger announced that the Red Cross is holding a free course regarding how they interact with other agencies. He also announced that there is a new book and two audiocassettes designed for persons with disabilities. There is a nominal cost for these.

Scott Coffman announced that the Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District approved a motion commending the SB South Coast Fire Safe Council and a \$250 donation.

Damaris Sholes from MERRAG (Montecito Emergency Response Recovery Action Group) welcomed Fire Safe Council members to their meetings on the third Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m.

The Montecito Trails Foundation is holding a fundraiser at Rancho Carinoso located at 2825 Padaro Lane on Saturday, September 27. Anyone interested in attending may contact Michael Bill or Curtis Vincent.

Charlie Johnson invited members interested in a site visit of the Santa Rosa fire to contact him about scheduling a time.

Adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

## THE SECOND MEETING

### Develop a Mission Statement

A mission statement is a statement of purpose and the ideal or basic reason for the existence of the organization. It should be broad in scope and define the organization's philosophy. In addition, it should be short and easy to understand. Based on your discussion of what everyone wanted to accomplish with the Fire Safe Council, create a draft mission statement and present it at the second meeting. Once you or another Council member has proposed a mission statement, the Council should review and finalize it.

Consider reviewing mission statements from other Fire Safe Councils. Here is the mission statement for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

*"The mission of the Fire Safe Council is to preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe."*

### Determine Overall Objectives

After establishing a mission statement, Council members should think about how the Council will fulfill the mission. Objectives state what will have occurred if the mission is successfully achieved. When determining objectives, make sure they relate to the mission and that they are measurable, achievable and results-oriented.

Consider reviewing the objectives from other Fire Safe Councils. Here are the objectives for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

- *Unite Council members to speak with one voice on fire safety*
- *Use marketing expertise and communication channels of Council members to increase distribution of fire prevention education materials*
- *Discuss and evaluate legislation pertaining to fire safety*
- *Empower grass roots organizations and individuals to create fire safe communities*

### Finalize a Name and/or Logo

Choose a name for your Council to give it an identity. Most local Fire Safe Councils have chosen to include a specific city or region in their name. Nevada County Fire Safe Council, FireSafe Marin or the Laguna Beach Insurance Free Choice Discussion are

examples.

Pick a logo for the group to establish an identity in the community. Use the logo on letterhead, meeting agendas, fire safe project signs, brochures or anything you want to associate with the council. Many Fire Safe Councils have adopted the statewide Fire Safe Council's logo, while others have either altered this logo to fit their Council's needs or created an entirely new logo. [Download the statewide Council's logo](http://www.firesafecouncil.org) from [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org).

### **Revisit Projects and Determine Feasibility**

Persuade Council members to examine their resources and determine how each member can contribute to a project's success. Many new Councils choose to begin with small projects and work their way up to larger undertakings. Small projects will yield faster results and gratification, which will build momentum for the group.

### **Assign Responsibility for Projects**

Ask for volunteers and be encouraging, as some members may be shy or hesitant because this is a new area of knowledge for them. Some Council members may have a special interest in specific projects, or may be able to commit certain resources. Make sure that all projects undertaken by the Council have been assigned to an individual or group of individuals to ensure that the project gets done.

### **Target Future Members**

Fire safety involves the whole community and the health of your council depends upon constant efforts to involve more people. Enlist volunteers to focus on membership recruitment. Remember, it may take several months to convince certain partners to participate in your Council. In fact, some partners may not join the Council until a fire threatens. This fire will create a window of opportunity. During this period of heightened awareness and concern, your Council can attract new members and advance fire safe programs.

## THE THIRD MEETING

### Approve the Mission Statement and Goals

If you have not done so, reach consensus and approve the mission statement.

### Ask Members to Provide Status Reports

This will promote a feeling of progress and, eventually, a sense of accomplishment. Praise success and troubleshoot roadblocks. These status reports will generate excitement for projects and help sustain the Council's momentum.

### Look to the Future

Although the Council may have temporarily exhausted its short-term resources, it is important to continue to look at the future of the Council. Brainstorm a few ideas for possible future fire safety projects and distribute these ideas to the Council. This will encourage Council members to begin thinking about tackling the next project or inspire them to initiate new ideas.

#### *Ideas*

- **Community Awareness Project** – Partner with a local sports team to host an event to promote awareness of fire danger, including a display at the stadium/ballpark, informational handouts and children's competitions.
- **Alternative Water Source Identification** – Community-wide program to identify and provide a standard pavement or curb marker for homes with pools and spas which could serve as additional and alternative sources of water for firefighters during an extensive fire.
- **Toll free 1-800 Fire Safe Phone Line** – Hosted by a local phone company.
- **Fire Safe Outreach Teams** -- Volunteers trained and organized in advance to answer questions, provide speakers and give presentations when seasonal change and heightened public awareness or anxiety create "teachable moments."

### Non-Profit Status

Some local Fire Safe Councils have obtained non-profit status so they could more easily accept donations. The Council should weigh all options and fully investigate the requirements for non-profit status before making a decision. To find out about the benefits of non-profit status and some of the alternatives, refer to the section, "Does Your Council Need Non-Profit Status?"

## **SUSTAINING MOMENTUM**

It is vital to maintain enthusiasm and interest in the Council among members. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

### **Recruit New Members**

New members will bring new ideas to the Council. Review the original invitation list you sent to the community. Identify invitees who do not attend Council meetings and persuade them to come to the next meeting. Is there anyone missing from the list?

### **Ask Each Member to Bring An Idea For a Fire Safe Project**

Different members have different areas of expertise. Tap the diversity of Council members by encouraging members to think of creative projects that interest them and their organizations. Members will devote more time and energy to a project when they can see a direct benefit.

### **Continue to Communicate With Existing Fire Safe Councils**

More established Councils have already experienced many of the growing pains your Council may experience and can provide insight on what works and what doesn't. Invite members of another Council to attend your Council meeting and speak.

### **Get Help from the Statewide Council**

The statewide Fire Safe Council is a source for videos, brochures, public service announcements and helpful hints. Use the Council's materials in your community. Canvass the neighborhood providing fire safety brochures to homeowners. Or work with your local cable television provider to broadcast a fire safety video or public service announcement. For example, Mission Viejo localized the Fire Safe Inside and Out video by creating an introduction from its fire department. Why spend precious resources creating new materials when the information is available right now? Most items can be downloaded from [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org).

### **Participate in Community Events**

Gain visibility by setting up a booth at a community fair and handing out fire safe information. Or, educate the community about fire safe landscaping by creating a small fire safe garden for fair-goers to enjoy.

### **Invite Members of the Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau**

Veteran Council members at the state and local levels have made themselves available

to visit Councils all over California. Speakers can share their strategies for helping communities begin Fire Safe Councils, funding sources for Councils and expanding Council membership. We will address the Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau later in the handbook.

Also, invite your own members to speak about their expertise, what they do, and how it affects the community's fire safety.

### **Generate Publicity**

Once a fire safe project is underway, share your good news! Call the local daily or weekly newspaper, and radio and television stations. Tell the editors about the Council's fire safe project and how it will benefit the community. Or, write a news release about the project, send it to local media and follow up with a phone call to determine if they will cover it. We will talk more about publicizing your Council later in the handbook.

## **FIRE SAFE COUNCIL SPEAKERS BUREAU**

### **What is a Speakers Bureau?**

It is a tool that can be used to initiate dialogue and action about an issue. Fire Safe Council speakers can help guide local Councils through the process of forming and sustaining a Fire Safe Council. Speakers come from a variety of backgrounds including the fire service and private organizations such as the electric company.

#### *Topics:*

- What Is a Fire Safe Council? Why Does Your Community Need One?
- Funding Your Fire Safe Council: Examples of Successful Public-Private Partnerships and Where You Can Look for Support
- Expanding Your Council's Membership
- Got a specific issue? Give us a call, chances are, we can talk about it!

Contact the Fire Safe Council Speakers Bureau at 916/447-7415.

## **PUBLICIZING YOUR COUNCIL AND GETTING TO KNOW THE MEDIA**

Media coverage can educate the community, gain recognition for the Council and build excitement. In addition, publicity gives the Council credibility when you are appealing to public and private partners for support.

### **What is News?**

There are basically two types of news: "hard" and "soft." A hard-news story is centered around an actual event such as a community chipper day. Hard-news stories also can be "late-breaking" stories that imply urgency, such as a wildfire outbreak that threatens 100 new homes in your area.

Soft or feature news stories are more conversational and "evergreen" in nature. They often include factual observations rather than explicit facts and data (which are the basis of most hard-news stories). For example, a story about tips for making your home and property fire safe that contains comments from the Council chairperson can appear any time and still have an impact on homeowners and wildland residents in your area.

It is important to know the difference between a "hard" and "soft" news angle. The form of your communication (hard or soft) will determine which editor/news director at your local newspaper/station will receive your written materials.

### **Who Are the Media and How Do They Differ?**

To successfully communicate with your audiences, it is imperative to understand the full range of media outlets available to you. Through your local public relations efforts, you will probably deal with radio, television, newspapers and newsletters.

Each media outlet tells its story differently. You will need to tailor your messages to fit the specific format of the media outlet in a way that preserves the integrity of the message you are trying to get out.

### ***Newspapers***

The weekly and daily newspapers in your community are more likely to highlight stories with local angles. Newspapers have more space available than other media, providing you with more opportunities to elaborate on your subject.

The city or metro desk editor should receive all hard-news press releases about late-breaking news. Some small community newspapers request that hard-news and late-breaking news stories be directed to the editor or managing editor who will assign the story to a reporter.

Late-breaking news stories have short lead times, ranging from 24 hours before a specific event to a few minutes in the case of urgent information about uncontrolled fires. Hard-news stories also have short time frames, the length of which is determined by the timing of the story.

Soft or feature stories are generally written by editors of any of the following sections: Features, View and Lifestyle. Small weekly newspapers normally have one editor assigned to writing feature stories. As a general rule, soft stories do not have pressing deadlines.

## ***Television***

Television news and talk show programs reach a broad range of viewers in your area. But most television hard-news, late-breaking news and features stories are limited to one- to two-minute segments, which don't allow you much time to provide extensive information about your subject. That means all messages conveyed must be short and concise!

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. It's this ability -- to bring things to life -- that makes television such a powerful and persuasive medium. Stories that can be told with several visual elements are more likely to be used since this is television's unique attribute. Keep this in mind as you approach the assignment editor or news director at your local television stations.

In addition to being a powerful persuasion device, television news is a business. Remember that the stations in your area compete for breaking news stories and viewers, which makes your ability to adhere to deadlines and lead times particularly important. If your Council chairperson plans to make an important statement at an event in your community, notify the assignment editor or news director approximately two to three days in advance. Direct all late-breaking news to the assignment desk.

In addition to news programs, television talk shows and public affairs programs are excellent vehicles that your spokesperson(s) can use to communicate your messages to residents in your area. Most interviews or feature segments average about 15 to 30 minutes. Lead times for these programs are critical, since most talk shows book guests six to eight weeks in advance.

## ***Radio***

Radio has been referred to as the most "personal" medium because it reaches listeners in their homes, cars and at work.

Most radio news stories are limited to 30 to 60 seconds since the average newscast lasts only a few minutes. Direct all publicity materials to the news director or assignment editor. Some smaller stations require that news releases and news alerts

be forwarded to the program director or station manager. Check with each station to determine what it prefers.

Public affairs and news talk shows provide the only opportunities for your spokesperson to develop your key points in depth. Call-in format programs also provide you with one of the only opportunities to have your spokesperson(s) interact with your target audience listeners.

Four weeks is the average lead time for booking guests on these programs.

At many large radio stations, one producer or contact person books the interviews for each program. The public affairs director normally schedules the interviews at small radio stations.

### ***Newsletters***

Professional and community newsletters often report local stories of interest to their specific audiences. Newsletters such as those published by your local Homeowner Associations, PTA, and Chamber of Commerce are excellent media vehicles for reaching stakeholders in your area. Depending on the nature of the publication, newsletter articles can be technical or conversational.

The lead time and deadline of each specific newsletter depends on the frequency of the publication. Most newsletters are published monthly or quarterly. Direct your releases and correspondences to the editor or the communications department of the organization.

### **Locating the Media**

Media contacts change often. So be sure to call each newspaper or station each time you contact them to verify their mailing address and to find out who to send your materials to. Sending information to the wrong person or to a person who is no longer there can land your hard work in the trash can. Here are some key questions to ask when you do call the media:

#### ***Questions for Print Media:***

- Who is the city desk editor, the features editor and the metro editor?
- If it is a weekly newspaper, magazine or Sunday magazine, what is the lead time for the publication and when is the issue published?

#### ***Questions for Television Media:***

- Who are the news director and assignment editor?
- Ask the programming department at television stations the following questions:  
Does the station air any talk or public affairs programs? What is the general subject

matter? When does the program air? Is the program live or taped? Who is the contact person?

***Questions for Radio Media:***

- Who are the news director and the assignment editor?
- Who is the public affairs director? What is the lead time for public service announcements? What format is best -- audio cassette or scripts?
- Ask the programming department whether the station airs any public affairs or talk shows. Find out the format of the program. Does the program have a call-in format? Does the station permit telephone interviews versus in-studio interviews? Is the program live or taped? What is the lead time for booking guests? Who is the contact person?

## **Pitch Letters**

A pitch letter is a concisely written, one-page letter that "sells" your idea to the media. The ultimate goal of any pitch letter is to persuade the editor, reporter or producer you're pitching to cover your story.

The key points to remember when writing pitch letters are that they should be short and to the point, as informative and newsworthy as possible (place the most important information near the lead of the letter) and most importantly, they must be attention-grabbing.

The media, in some instances, receive hundreds of pitch letters per week. To make sure yours is noticed, read and remembered -- and not thrown away -- try to make the lead of your pitch as interesting as possible.

Pitch letters should be accompanied, whenever possible, by a news release or background information on your subject. Pitch letters should be on letterhead, such as your Council's.

Make sure to follow up all pitch letters with a brief phone call (placed two to three days after mailing or faxing the letter). If you do not follow up, your story idea may be forgotten or ignored. Editors and reporters are often out of the office, so be persistent.

## **SAMPLE PITCH LETTER**

NAME  
NAME OF MEDIA OUTLET  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear Mr./Ms. LAST NAME,

Fire is a fact of California life. But for those of us who live, work and recreate in California's fire dependent wildlands, fire can be a source of fear and a significant drain on the public and private cost of living.

Whether it's the governmental costs of preventing or combating wildfires, or the private cost of insurance, fire-safe building standards, or, occasionally and tragically, the cost of rebuilding a life devastated by fire, none of us goes untouched.

The (CITY/TOWN) of (NAME OF CITY) has formed (NAME OF FIRE SAFE COUNCIL) to deal with fire as a fact of life. (NAME OF COUNCIL) is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. The Council's goal is to preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing the public to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe.

So far (NAME OF COUNCIL) has (LIST 2 or 3 COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AND/OR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS HERE)....

Our next fire safe project will be to (DISCUSS PROJECT). About (APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS) (NAME OF COUNCIL) members and community residents will gather (DATE AND TIME OF EVENT) at (LOCATION OF EVENT) to (ACTIVITY TO BE PERFORMED). Our goal is to (STATE GOAL).

This is especially vital to your readership because of the increasing spread of NAME OF COMMUNITY'S population into wildland areas where homes and businesses are at substantially greater risk, and where the resources needed to safeguard them are far greater and more costly.

I will call you within the week to gauge your interest in covering this event. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at (PHONE NUMBER).

Sincerely,

NAME  
TITLE  
NAME OF FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

## News Releases

News releases are the most common form of communication with the media. News releases are brief, factual, informative materials that are meant to assist an editor or reporter with writing a story.

The lead, which is the first paragraph of the release, is the most critical element. In most cases, the lead is a synopsis of the news and should contain the five W's and one H -- who, what, where, when, why and how. The succeeding paragraphs should be written in declining importance and should enhance the lead. Feature stories can be more creative. The overall style of a news release should be like that of a newspaper -- factual and concise. Be sure to verify data and spelling of words in the release.

Following is a list of things to consider when writing a news release:

- Identify the news release with a headline -- make it thought-provoking and concise
- Double space
- Include the following at the top of the release: contact name, title, affiliation, telephone number and date of release
- Write in news style – keep sentences simple and forget flowery writing
- End each page with "more" and close the release with "# # #"
- Limit the release to two pages if possible
- Remember to include the five W's and one H in the lead
- Don't break paragraphs between lines or pages
- Don't break proper names between lines or pages

## **SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE**

*The following news release will serve as a guide to help you announce new programs, meetings and updates on your community's fire problem. News releases should be concise, specific and convey a clear message. Once the release is written, it can be sent to local print, television and radio via fax, mail or e-mail. Be sure to include your name as the contact. The contact should also place follow-up calls to gauge the media's interest and commitment to writing or broadcasting the story.*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact:     Your Name  
                  Phone Number

### **FIRE SAFE COUNCIL TO HOST SPRING CLEAN UP DAY**

#### **Fire Department Says Brush Clearance Will Increase A Home's Ability to Survive Wildfire**

(City, Month, Day, Year) -- The first paragraph should announce the fire safe project and its goal. Keep this paragraph as short as possible; two sentences or fewer is the general rule.

The second paragraph should go into more detail about the project including the date and time for the event. It may be helpful to determine the most interesting aspect of the project and include it here. For example, is this a public-private partnership? Has a prominent area business contributed to this project?

A quote should be inserted here. The quote should come from someone who is working closely on the program, the chairperson of the Council or a member of the fire department (if applicable). The quote should not repeat the information already mentioned in the release, but enhance it. The spokesperson(s) can talk about why your organization felt there was a need for this project and why it is important.

-- more --

## **Fire Safe Council Will Host Spring Clean up Day**

2-2-2-2

The fourth paragraph should detail three primary benefits or goals of the project as it specifically relates to your community. You may want to think about tying the project into the fire history/problem of the community and how the project will help alleviate the problem. In this paragraph, briefly mention future plans (if any) for the Council.

The final paragraph should act as either a boilerplate or should include the least important information. For example: (NAME OF COUNCIL) is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. The Council's goal is to preserve (NAME OF COMMUNITY/COUNTY)'s natural and manmade resources by mobilizing the public to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. For more information on how to get involved, call (PHONE NUMBER).

# # #

## **Calendar Listings**

Newspapers and radio stations often feature calendar of event listings. Send information about upcoming community events that you would like the public to attend to the calendar editor at least two to six weeks prior to the event to maximize the chances of its inclusion in the news.

### ***SAMPLE CALENDAR LISTING***

**ATTENTION CALENDAR EDITOR**

Contact: Your Name  
Phone Number

#### **FIRE SAFE COUNCIL TO HOST SPRING CLEAN UP DAY**

**WHO:** (NAME OF FIRE SAFE COUNCIL)  
**WHAT:** (PROJECT; FOR EXAMPLE, COMMUNITY CLEAN UP PROJECT)  
**WHEN:** (DATE AND TIME)  
**WHERE:** (LOCATION ADDRESS)  
**CONTACT:** For further information, call (YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER)

**###**

## NON-PROFIT STATUS

Filing for and established not-for-profit tax status with the federal government allows local Councils to accept monetary donations without being taxed by the federal government.

The Fire Safe Council, via its membership in the California Community Forests Foundation (CCFF), offers non-profit benefits to Councils who choose not to become non-profits themselves. The statewide Council/CCFF can accept donations on your behalf and turn the funds over to you. The CCFF charges a 10 percent fee to administer those funds, which is lower than most other foundations' fees.

Your Council also may consider making a similar arrangement with local organizations such as firefighters associations or local environmental groups who have already established not-for-profit status.

## IN-KIND SUPPORT IS VALUABLE

Spreading the fire safety message to the community does not have to be costly. Throughout this handbook we have provided many examples of partnerships that can help get your Council off the ground without a lot of money.

Your Fire Safe Council should always be looking for ways to stretch existing resources and maximize partnership opportunities. Partnerships give your Council the chance to provide organizations and businesses with programs and activities that extend their mission. Cooperative programs also can secure their long-term commitment to fire safety.

Partnerships can be as simple as persuading a local business to display a fire safety poster. And small-scale partnerships with local government or a neighborhood merchant can be just as effective as partnerships with large companies.

### Initiating Successful Partnerships

Asking companies, local businesses, community groups or government offices to form partnerships involves going through the proper channels. Although each organization has different protocols, here are some tips to initiate a fire safety partnership:

- **Choose a specific topic or project.** Don't ask to form a partnership based on the broad topic of fire safety. Target a specific area such as encouraging homeowners to clear brush; teaching children about stop, drop and roll; or hosting a spring clean-up program.
- **Develop an angle.** Think about partnering with groups that will benefit from the partnership.
- **Outline the benefits in a proposal.** Write down every reason the target

organization will benefit from this partnership. Present your case as an opportunity that cannot be missed.

- **Contact the organization.** Partnerships do not have to be made with strangers. Consider approaching friends or acquaintances with your ideas.
- **Be flexible. Be patient.** Like any relationship, building a partnership takes time and compromise.

## **WWW.FIRESAFECOUNCIL.ORG**

Post your meeting minutes, download educational materials and keep up with other Councils. The web site includes:

- **Local Council Sites**  
Set up your site and see what other Councils are doing by visiting theirs, hosted by the statewide Council.
- **Links**  
Visit statewide council member and other sites with relevant fire safe information.
- **Fire Safe Inside and Out**  
Fire safety tips and strategies for inside and outside the home. Access the brochure and homeowner checklist on the site. Call the statewide Council to order the 20-minute video.
- **Fire Safe Landscaping**  
Highlights four keys to a fire safe landscape: planning, spacing, watering and maintenance. Download the brochure online, call the statewide Council for the 10-minute video.
- **Fire Safe Council Brochure**  
Summarizes the Council's mission, goals and membership. Print it out to send with your first letter of invitation.
- **Fire Safe California Community Action Kit**  
Complete community fire safety guide produced for the Fire Safe Council by CDF and Western Insurance Information Service. The 30-page book is available online. Order the 12-minute video by calling the statewide Council.
- **California Fire Plan Overview**  
A full-color, double-sided primer on the California Fire Plan. Distribute it at your first meeting and use it as a handout at community events.
- **California Fire Plan Complete Document**  
Link to CALFIRE's web site to download the entire Fire Plan as an Adobe Acrobat or HTML file.

- **Non-Profit Application**

Use this sample application to help your Council apply for non-profit status.

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