



Coastal Fire Centre

hot topics in Wildfire on the Coast

Wildfire news

Issue 12

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FireSmart Communities

What makes a forest? One tree? A group of trees? How many? In another article, we suggested your house “be a Doug fir, not a pine tree”. How about your neighbourhood? How does that work?

FireSmart communities can work toward recognition – and this recognition is more about people in neighbourhoods working together than what local government does. These undertakings have additional benefits beyond protecting your home from high intensity wildfires, but let’s start there.

Some FireSmart principles extend into Priority Zone three, which is 30 – 100 meters from your home. It is possible this is not your property. By neighbours helping neighbours, not only does the work get done, but a community is born in the true sense of the word – “ a group of people with a common background or with shared interests within society”.

By enlarging your FireSmart view to your neighbourhood, it is possible to assess the entire neighbourhood’s fire resilience. It is also necessary to face some hard truths.

When neighbourhoods burn, first responders’ ability to respond will be taxed. The first priority will always be people’s safety – both the first responders and the civilians in the area. Getting out of the area if an evacuation order has been issued helps – so work on your evacuation plan. <http://www.embc.gov.bc.ca/em/index.htm> You might also consider volunteering to help your community if a disaster does happen – Emergency Operations Centres are run by people just like you.

Most fire departments are able to respond to one, or possibly two, house fires per truck at the same time. If more homes than two per truck are burning, the ability of the home to survive the wildfire will likely rest on FireSmart principals alone. Fire Departments will attempt to prevent other homes that have not started to burn from igniting, and will choose which homes are possible to save based on their likelihood of survival – again, FireSmart will play a part here.

Here’s another hard truth. Wildfires are less likely to ignite large groups of homes in a neighbourhood where structures are FireSmart. What this reflects is that burning homes can ignite other homes. An intense crown fire at the front of the wildfire passes rapidly – on average within a minute. This is because the fire front consumes the fuel, and the remaining fuel can only support lower intensity ground fires. If a home has not ignited in that minute from radiant heat

from the wildfire, the risk will come from another type of ignition – sparks finding places to take hold, from the ground fire directly contacting the home, or from the radiant heat of adjacent homes burning.

However, you are not helpless, and simple mitigations have huge impacts. These mitigations do not need to be expensive to be effective, and can be implemented in steps and stages. The vast majority of the physical mitigations are easily within the ability of most able bodied people. The minimal administrative support needed for the FireSmart community program to work can be managed by anyone.

Working together in your neighbourhood has the added benefit of making the job easier. Meetings can educate neighbours of the risks and how to reduce them. Home evaluations can be done in groups and neighbours can help neighbours during yard clean-up bees. The FireSmart community assessments can take into account special local features that need attention like wildlife trees, or special values that matter to residents like aesthetics, sight and sound buffers and privacy. FireSmart at this level is flexible – it is about reducing risk, not imposing a look. Any reduction of risk is a step in the right direction and will have an impact.

FireSmart Community Recognition programs are not about getting a sign or a sticker. It’s about drawing neighbours together into a community, and working toward a common goal within a plan that really works. The best size of your community is about “block party size” – about 20 – 50 homes (and not much bigger). The application process will lead the group through simple steps to form the core group and the formation of the board, then move through the hazard assessments, creation of the plan and implementing the solutions in FireSmart events. Most neighbourhoods that undertake these events find they are once a year events that become something people look forward to, as they foster easy, fun interactions with neighbours – people you can wave to as you pick up your mail or stop and chat with when you walk your dog. You can find out more at FireSmart Canada <https://www.firesmartcanada.ca/firesmart-communities/community-recognition-program/> and by contacting your local fire department.

It’s your home. It’s your neighbourhood. It’s your responsibility, and it’s within your power.

To Report a Wildfire:
1-800-663-5555
Or Call *5555

To Report a Wildfire: 1-800-663-5555 Or Cell *5555

Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative (SWPI)

The B.C. government and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities are providing new grants totalling \$500,000 to help communities identify and take action to reduce wildfire risks on private land.

Fifty grants of up to \$10,000 each will be made available to local governments and First Nations through the Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative (SWPI).

The 2016 SWPI FireSmart Grant program will support communities to plan for wildfire prevention activities on private lands, as identified through the FireSmart Communities Program. FireSmart activities help decrease wildfire threats to homes and property and can prevent damage to structures, increase the effectiveness of firefighters and safeguard fire-suppression resources.

Funding provided through the 2016 SWPI FireSmart Grant program may be used to:

- Enhance public awareness of FireSmart principles.
- Increase community participation in FireSmart activities.
- Advance planning to address wildfire mitigation on private land.

- Help communities obtain official recognition as "FireSmart Communities".

FireSmart recognition involves engaging neighbours, property owners, local government and First Nations authorities and other agencies to meet a set of recognition criteria to assist communities become more resilient to wildfire.

The Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative is administered by the Provincial Fuel Management Working Group, which includes the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the First Nations' Emergency Services Society. The FireSmart Communities program is administered by Partners in Protection Association (PiP).

Applications for the SWPI FireSmart Grant program are being accepted until Nov. 30, 2015. The Program & Application Guide and Application Form is available on the UBCM website: <http://www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/funding/fgps/current-fgps-programs/strategic-wildfire-prevention.html>

Local FireSmart Representative Workshops for BC

What: FireSmart Workshop that will provide participants with the 'knowledge, skills and tools to protect their communities from Wildland-Urban Interface fires.

When: November 17 & 18, 2015

Where: Burnaby Lake Sports Complex West, 3677 Kensington Avenue, Burnaby, BC

Who Should Attend: Local government and First Nation staff and/or elected officials familiar with WUI issues and FireSmart principles who wish to implement the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program in their community.

Cost: Free of charge but you must register.



To register go to:

<http://tinyurl.com/CoastalFireSmart2>

Why Go: The workshop will assist local government and First Nations to implement the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program in

their jurisdiction.

For more information go to:

<http://tinyurl.com/luuv7t8>

Or email: lgps@ubcm.ca

For more information about the FireSmart principles including great reference material please go to:

<https://www.firesmartcanada.ca/>



Wood Lake



Boulder Creek



Cougar Creek



Elaho



Lizard Lake

FireSmart for Individuals

Be a Doug fir – not a pine tree.

Have you ever seen those terrible aerial photos of neighbourhoods swept by wildfires? Have you ever wondered why some homes burn and some don't? Or how about a lone tree that stands after the wildfire sweeps through. Why? It isn't just the luck of the draw.

Douglas firs are adapted to wildfire. They raise their flammable canopy well above ground fires – 50 meters or more. A healthy Douglas fir forest is well spaced, with few touching branches to move a crown fire from tree to tree. Both of these tactics reduce crown fire ignition from convection (direct contact). They have thick bark that resists radiant heat from ground fires, and have few notches and dead vegetation to allow embers places to gain hold. They have fast growth that outpaces their competitors, which results in shade that prevents the formation of heavy undergrowth and reduces ground fire intensity. They drop lower branches, which results in their iconic look, but also removes ladder fuels that allow ground fires to climb into tree canopies. All of these factors result in lower intensity fires which contribute to Douglas fir trees standing in drier sites while less drought-tolerant and fire-tolerant species succumb. The science behind FireSmart has strong parallels to the natural defences that Douglas firs use.

You can ensure your valuable flammable fuels – your home – are out of harm's way by paying attention to the home ignition zones. Treatments in Priority zones one and two distance your home from passing wildfires. They also remove the risk of a crown fire adjacent to your home – the same way the Douglas fir forest naturally spaces its trees. By reducing fuel loads within 30 meters (and further reductions up to 100 meters) of your home, the fire intensity reduces, resulting in a lower temperature ground fires instead of hot, intense crown fires. Removing ladder fuels prevents the fire from climbing into the canopy of your trees. FireSmart construction techniques provide resistance to radiant heat and spark intrusion, the same protection the Douglas fir's bark provides.

Studies in the U.S., Australia and Canada have led to the conclusion that certain conditions (a

non-flammable roof and 10 meter clearance from fuels) will result in a 85-90% chance the home will survive a wildfire. FireSmart principles are based on that science. Those are pretty good odds for undertaking work that is relatively simple, inexpensive and manageable for most homeowners.

The new term is “fire adapted neighbourhoods” which encompasses the concept that if we choose to live in interface areas with the peace and beauty of nature, we need to be part of it, not separate from it. We need to do our part so the forest can remain healthy despite our living there. If each of our homes could become as fire adapted as a Douglas Fir, wildfire response would be much different.

Many of the FireSmart methods used to modify vegetation mimic the way the forest would be if we allowed wildfires to burn – if we want to exclude wildfires near homes, we need to take on the work the wildfire would do. Many of the techniques applied to homes prevent an ember storm from taking hold. It is estimated that half of home ignitions from wildfires are from the embers that swirl in the winds the wildfire creates. These ember storms are like snowstorms, and embers build up in cracks and in valleys on roofs, along the edges of house foundations and along fences and posts just as snowflakes do.

Oh, and why don't you want to be a pine tree? Pine trees have a different strategy for wildfire. The tree has no resistance to fire, burns furiously and then dies, but its seedlings regrow quickly on the ashes that are left behind. They are so adapted to this regime that some pines need a wildfire to open its cones to allow its seeds to sprout. That's akin to just letting your home burn and then rebuilding.

The lesson? Make your home like a fire-adapted Douglas fir tree – and not a vulnerable pine. That just makes sense.



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To Date in Coastal

Fires to Date

Person Caused 198

Lighting Caused 59

Total Number of Fires 139

Fire Danger Rating as of Oct 9



Current Prohibitions (within WMB jurisdictional area)

none

Mitigating Fuels Around the WUI Home

Ladder Fuels—Prune all tree branches from ground level up to a height of 10 feet above ground or up to 1/3 the height of the tree, whichever is less. Do not prune further up because it could jeopardize the health of the tree. Shrubs should be pruned based on specifications recommended for the species. Dead branches should be removed whenever possible.

Surface Fuels—Dispose of any heavy accumulation of logs, branches and slash by chipping, hauling to a disposal site or piling for burning later.

Duff Layers—Due to decades of fire suppression, decomposing layers of pine needles, twigs and other organic debris—called duff – is deeper under many large trees today than it would have been a century ago. flames burning in the duff layer can pre-heat live vegetation and ignite the trees, or the tree’s roots can be damaged from the intense heat of the smoldering duff, killing

the tree. It is important to rake needle or duff layers deeper than 2 inches at least 3 feet away from the base of large trees. This should be done annually, and the additional duff also should be removed from the area.

As much fuel as possible should be remove from directly around the home. This is called the **Defensible Space**. Three zones need to be addressed when creating defensible space:

- Zone 1 is the area nearest the home and other structures. This zone requires maximum hazard reduction.
- Zone 2 is a transitional area of fuels reduction between Zones 1 and 3.
- Zone 3 is the area farthest from the home. It extends from the edge of Zone 2 to your property boundaries.

For more information go to: FireSmartCanada.ca

At Coastal

It continues to be a busy time around the Fire Centre. Most crew members have been released. Crew leaders remain to tidy up any projects, complete paperwork and deal with any mishaps from Category 2 or Category 3 burning. It is important for homeowners and industry to deal with any debris, and despite the cooler weather, staff continues to monitor and educate those who are burning about safe practices.

One of the most important items on the agendas of senior officers, and heads of departments, is a series of debriefs where staff get together in person or through conference calls and take a good, long look at the fire season. What went right? What went wrong? How can we as an organization improve? Does there need to be more training of specific skills that will improve performance? It is part of a continuous improvement program that this organization prides itself on.

And of course, we try to look forward. What will 2016 look like? Only time will tell.

Home Insurance

The Coastal Fire Centre was struck by the number of insurance and real estate companies that contacted our office looking for information on the status of fires this year. We discovered that insurance underwriters will not write, or renew policies, in areas where there is a wildfire. Having a fire contained, in mop-up or in patrol was not adequate. The fire must be declared ‘Out’ in order for the insurance industry to write or renew a policy.

Different underwriters have different criteria. Some may not write or renew a policy if a wildfire is within 25 kilometres while others may not write a policy if a wildfire is within 50 kilometres. This left some residents without coverage and also held up many real estate transactions because proof of insurance is required to obtain a mortgage.

This is a business decision on the part of the insurance industry and has nothing to do with BC Wildfire Service. However, we do encourage homeowners to renew their policies during the winter months when it is less likely that wildfire activity will cause complications.