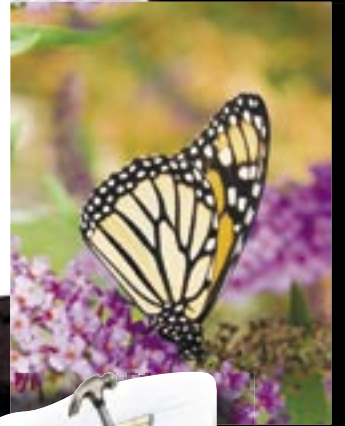


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Homes & Land Improvement

In this tight and uncertain economy, we're all trying to find ways to hang on to our money. Some of us are having to make major lifestyle changes and downsizing our list of necessities. But we still need to protect our homes from all sorts of possible calamities, such as weather and wildfires.

In that vein, this special publication, "Home & Land Improvement," strives to give local property owners and renters cost-saving ideas to upgrade their homes and lands. Saving costs, in this sense, translates into reducing expenses for energy in your home, and getting paid a portion of your expenses for doing so.

And in the big picture, you're helping not only protect the Earth, but stimulating your local economy when you use the advertisers who supported this publication to make these improvements. We hope you find "Homes & Land Improvement" a great resource.

Becky Clark, Publisher-Editor

Idyllwild Town Crier staff who compiled "Home & Land Improvement" are: Publisher-Editor Becky Clark; Operations Manager Jim Crandall; News Editor J.P. Crumrine; Staff Reporter Marshall Smith; Advertising Sales Manager Grace Reed; Advertising Sales Representative Kathy Bryson; Production Assistant James Larkin; Copy Editor Beth Nottley; and Office Manager Sandy Burns.

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Change a light bulb and save the world

By Marshall Smith
Staff Reporter

Dr. Charlie Zender, University of California, Irvine, professor of atmospheric physics, practices what he preaches. His research, like that of other scientists who contribute to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), predicts dramatic global warming with rapidly spiking global mean temperatures never before seen on the planet. He practices carbon footprint reduction by changing his light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) and installing energy-efficient appliances in his home. "Each of us can contribute to reducing carbon footprints," said Zender.

According to power supplier Southern California Edison (SCE), CFLs last up to 10 times longer than regular incandescent bulbs, use up to 75 percent less energy and save up to \$65 in annual energy costs.

Using CFLs, according to SCE, also reduces greenhouse gas emissions, the prime contributor to global warming.

CFLs come in several shapes and sizes to meet consumers' needs, whether for a table lamp, wall sconce, outdoor floodlight, ceiling fan or track lighting.

SCE's Operation Light Exchange allows residential customers to exchange halogen torchiere floor lamps and incandescent floor/table/desk lamps and night-lights for new Energy Star-labeled lamps. To learn more about that program, visit www.scelampexchange.com/.

Since CFLs contain trace amounts of mercury, they must be disposed of in a recycling center as "household hazardous waste."

Replacing older appliances with U.S. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency-approved Energy Star appliances can earn rebates from power suppliers that can help offset the cost of purchase of

new appliances. SCE currently offers a \$50 rebate, as advertised on its site (www.sce.com/residential/rebates-savings/appliance/energy-star) if one purchases an Energy Star-qualified refrigerator "while funding is still available" (the SCE site includes an extensive list of qualifying products). Check the purchase receipt to see if the seller provided an instant rebate; if not, complete the SCE rebate application and send with the required documentation to SCE; and provide information from your SCE bill requested on the application.

SCE also offers a recycling program for refrigerators and freezers, and pays qualified consumers \$50 to haul away the old appliance. To qualify, one must be an SCE customer; the appliance must be picked up at the SCE service address; the appliance must be in working condition at the time of pick up; and the size of the

appliance must be between 10 to 27 cubic feet.

SCE claims that by swapping out old, energy-inefficient appliances with new, energy-efficient ones, consumers might save up to \$292 on their energy bill. SCE adds that California law prohibits dumping your appliance in a landfill, and that many companies charge a fee for disposal.

Similar to other offers, SCE will pay a \$30 rebate when a consumer purchases a new, energy-efficient electric water heater with an energy factor of .93 or higher. The SCE site provides a list of qualifying products.

Energy auditors recommend lowering temperature settings on water heaters and insulating the heaters if they are located in an unheated area of one's home, after checking the manufacturer's guidelines and warranty criteria.

Under the California Solar Initiative, power suppli-

ers provide rebates on fixed and tracking solar energy (photovoltaic) systems. Incentives are based on the size and characteristics of the installation and the customer classification (an increased incentive level is available to government and nonprofit organizations.)

Lastly, water is the most important human resource and one that is becoming more expensive and less available around the planet. By reducing water consumption, fixing dripping faucets, installing low-volume or dual-flush toilets, low-flow showerheads, and water-efficient dishwashers and clothes washing machines, one can save both water and money.

Local water districts offer rebates for purchasing many of these appliances. The water district phone numbers are Idyllwild, 659-2143; Fern Valley, 659-2200; Pine Cove, 659-2675; and Lake Hemet, 658-3241.

Aerators on faucets can significantly reduce water volume; water-saving showerheads can cut the volume of water used down to 1.2 gallons per minute or less.

See Save, page 6

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Full- and part-time residents are reminded that fire hazard abatement on private property is a year-round project, not just during summer months, since fallen pine needles, weeds and dead oak leaves build up if not raked.

Fire abatement rules may be found in the Town Crier's free "Fire & Water" publication, available at the office, or at any fire station on the Hill.

Evacuation brochures at TC

The Riverside County Sheriff's Department is again providing brochures on evacuation in case of a wildfire.

Brochures are available for free at the Idyllwild Town Crier office, 54295 Village Center Drive, or at www.towncrier.com.



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Energy efficiency, insulation & affordability

By Marshall Smith
Staff Reporter

Local contractor Gregg Williams of Rainbow Construction suggests effective weather-stripping as an important and cost-effective step in saving money on energy costs. "Start with providing new or replacing ineffective old weather-stripping around windows and under doors," said Williams, who suggested a palette of potential improvements — from less to more expensive — that can save homeowners money over time.

To help ensure that heat is going where it is needed when it is most needed, replace manual thermostats with programmable digital thermostats that permit one to program each day or each week to exact needs of residents. For instance, a programmable thermostat may be set to reduce heat demands when residents go to bed, and when they go to work, when the home is unoccupied — maximizing only those times when occupants are at home and awake. And as additional insurance and if possible, given the floor plan and configuration of a house, heat only those rooms necessary, by closing off vents.

Next, Williams suggested inspecting furnace filters every 30 days and replacing them if needed. Making certain that built-up particulate matter does not block

the filter ensures that the maximum amount of air that carries heat is flowing through the filter at any one time. Lightweight pleated filters you can't see through have more surface area, because of the pleats, and allow more air and heat to pass. They are also relatively inexpensive to replace on the order of three for \$10, according to Williams.

Next, Williams recommends insulating attics, and if the house is constructed with crawlspace under the first floor, insulating under the floor as well. "If the floor is cold, you're cold, and you turn on more heat to compensate," said Williams. "If it's possible to insulate under your flooring, that will keep your floor warmer, and overall energy cost down."

Although some manufacturers suggest solar fans for attics to draw out built-up heat in the summer, Williams does not think them necessary in our climate. "It usually doesn't get hot enough here to merit that expense," said Williams. "Just insulate the attic and make sure there are vents on both ends of the attic to allow built-up heated air to escape in the summer." In choosing insulation, Williams recommends the highest "R" factor rating for the insulation.

"With an older cabin, if you do any remodeling that requires replacing or building a wall, insulate that wall on both sides," he suggested.

And for maximum effectiveness in older homes, if the money is available to do so, Williams recommends replacing all single-pane windows with dual- or triple-pane windows, and opening up and insulating all walls. "If you can afford it and you have single-pane windows, the new [multiple pane] ones are incredibly efficient and come with great weather-stripping," he said.

Lastly, if relying on a fireplace for partial or total home heating, a fireplace insert, although expensive, helps to maximize fireplace efficiency. The self-contained, freestanding Ben Franklin type heating stoves, especially those with fans that kick in when heat builds up to maximum levels within the stove, are very

effective.

As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) signed into law on Feb. 18, 2009, homeowners can receive up to \$1,500 in tax credits for investments in insulation, exterior doors and windows.

By maximizing a home's efficiency, homeowners can reduce utility bills up to 20 percent. By being proactive on anticipating energy needs and projecting costs, homeowners will not be blindsided by high utility bills. Experts recommend



contacting an auditor to conduct a home energy audit. Visit energystar.gov to locate an auditor. They also recommend staying on top of rising energy costs. Organizations like Alliance to Save Energy, ase.org, offer tools that project upcoming

energy costs in your state. And finally, to know the recommended "R" value for insulation in your area visit the U.S. Department of Energy at doe.gov to consult a table.

E-mail Marshall Smith at marshall@towncrier.com.

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Save

Continued from page 3

Some even have a pause button to let you stop the water while soaping or shampooing. Planet Green (planetgreen.discovery.com) interns found that spending about \$30 on low-flow showerheads and faucets is estimated to save 45 out of 265 gallons of water typically used by a household per day.

Marshall Smith can be reached at marshall@towncrier.com.

When selecting a room's color scheme, take cues from your own wardrobe and favorite objects.

Funding for weatherizing homes

Riverside County has received more than \$2 million in federal funds to help residents weatherize their homes.

The Riverside County Community Action Partnership helps homeowners and tenants with the cost of improvements, including insulation, venting and window repairs. The grant also helps residents purchase energy-efficient appliances.

Making improvements to reduce heat loss or switching to low-energy appliances can make a huge difference in a household's utilities bill, said County Energy Manager Godwin Aimua. Weatherized homes can save up to 20 percent in utilities costs, according to a 2001 county study.

The program also can help residents pay their utility bills. For more information on the program, call (951) 955-6418 or visit communityaction.riversidedpss.org.

Home repair program for seniors

Riverside County offers a program called Senior Helplink in partnership with the Economic Development Agency. The program helps seniors and adults with disabilities get minor and enhanced home repair.

For more information, call 1-800-510-2020.

Change smoke detector batteries

Riverside County Fire Department reminds residents to annually check their smoke detectors' batteries. Changing batteries before the old ones run out and testing all smoke detectors monthly can ensure you are warned in the event of a household fire. A working smoke alarm can often provide the critical extra time people need to get out to safety.



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Which is healthier: carpet or hardwood flooring?

By Marshall Smith
Staff Reporter

Although carpet manufacturers will argue differently, the preponderance of medical advice indicates that wood flooring, ceramic tile and even linoleum minimize health concerns for those with breathing-related conditions such as asthma, and reduce likelihood of allergic reactions.

In a Feb. 25, 2009, Mayo-Clinic.com article, clinic allergy specialist James Li, M.D. states that dust mites, which commonly settle into the weaves of carpets, can act as asthma triggers, and that replacing carpet with hard flooring surfaces such as vinyl, tile, or wood "may be a helpful part of an asthma treatment plan."

On the other hand, a 10-year study done in Sweden in the 1970s comparing allergy in carpeted rooms versus those with hardwood flooring found that



allergy levels went up in the rooms where carpet had been removed since there was nothing to trap the circulation of dirt, dust and contaminants floating through the air. The study concluded that with prudent and regular deep cleaning, carpet could be as healthy, if not more so, than hardwood flooring.

SmarterHomes.org.nz, based in New Zealand, a country long a leader in green/sustainable building, recommends scrutiny of any flooring material used in a residence. Specifically recommended are materials that are durable, don't emit volatile organic compounds (VOCs), can be recycled, and are made from sustainably sourced natural materials or from recycled materials.


VOCs are chemicals commonly found in carpets, carpet backings, treatments for stain resistance, carpet glues, vinyl flooring,

finishes such as polyurethane and paints, plastic wallpapers, and reconstituted wood products such as MDF (medium density fiberboard) and particleboard. At room temperatures, VOCs become airborne and breathable, and can have negative health effects. Some VOCs have

been linked to asthma. SmarterHomes recommends, in order to minimize VOC exposure, using carpet backings and pads made of felt, natural latex or jute; using water-based or acrylic-based adhesives for floor backing; seal any engineered timbers such

[See Flooring, next page](#)

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Flooring

Continued from previous page

as plywood; and consider flooring options that have very low VOC emissions, such as ceramic tiles, polished concrete and linoleum. And from an eco-

logical standpoint of waste reduction, SmarterHomes recommends using an insulated concrete slab for flooring — polished and sealed — as the cleanest, most VOC-free, most durable, and least maintenance-intensive.

Heavy materials such as

concrete, stone and tiles are durable and need little maintenance over time. Softer materials, such as carpets and coverings made from plant fibers, will not last as long, need regular deep cleaning to minimize dust mite and allergen collection, and will probably need replacement on a more regular basis than durable materials that could last the lifetime of a home.

Cost should be figured over a home's lifetime. The appearance of carpet being initially cheaper does not take into account the need to replace it more regularly than a "lifetime" hardwood or ceramic tile floor.

Some advantages to carpet include underfoot comfort; cushioning for slips and falls; less noise pollution; and natural insulation, providing additional warmth in cold seasons. As disadvantages, loops in

patterned carpets can get pulled, resulting in damage and possible spot replacement of the carpet — something made more difficult by the patterns found on the carpet. Olefin, polypropylene, polyethylene or polyolefin carpet soils easily, which could require additional maintenance and cleaning expense. And in general, carpet is not as long-lasting as hardwood or tile.

Damaged hardwood can be sanded and refinished rather than replaced. Damaged tiles can be replaced easily. Neither tile nor hardwood collects and stores as much dust, dust mites, pollen, pet dander, mold, mildew and other allergens. Disadvantages of hardwood include expansion during periods of high humidity and permanent damage requiring replacement from moisture leaks

from hot water heaters and other accidental flooding.

Finally, there is the consideration, when buying or remodeling a home, to investigate what is under wall-to-wall carpeting. If wood flooring, it could be

refinished, resulting in less expense than buying new carpeting and padding and providing a far more durable flooring material.

E-mail Marshall Smith at marshall@towncrier.com.

SCE help for qualifying households

Southern California Edison (SCE) is offering a low-income assistance program helping people replace refrigerators 10 years or older; installing evaporative coolers; or weatherizing homes.

SCE also is giving out four free compact fluorescent light bulbs that are long life and low energy to qualifying households. The program is available to homeowners or apartment dwellers who meet the following standards:

- Household size, 1 to 2; maximum household income, \$15,200;
- Household size, 3; maximum household income, \$29,600; or
- Household size, 4; maximum household income, \$35,600.

Customers over age 60 and/or disabled may not have to meet the income limits.

For more information, call SCE at 1-800-447-6620 or visit the Web site (www.sce.com.Edison).

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Drought won't stop deep freezes – protect pipes

By J.P. Crumrine
Assistant Editor

With the prolonged wet periods we've had this winter, many people, even some full-time residents, have experienced frozen and possibly burst pipes. But even when precipitation is not falling, freezing temperatures may create the same results. To prevent domestic flooding and alarming water bills, the water district general managers have several recommendations for protecting homes and water systems.

The same message was first and foremost on each manager's list. "I'll echo my colleagues. Make sure people shut water off whenever they leave the Hill," advised Steve Erler, Fern Valley Water District general manager.

Each manager suggested that homeowners inspect their water pipes. Each pipe, especially those exposed to outside air, should be insulated and wrapped. Underground plumbing, if deep enough, should be safe, according to Pine Cove Water District General Manager Jerry Holldber. And Idyllwild Water District General Manager Terry Lyons stressed wrapping outside faucets down to the ground.

The inside of the house should be inspected, too. With no heat, pipes can still freeze during a prolonged temperature drop. Drain the pipes and open faucets, especially in the kitchen and bathroom. There is environmentally safe antifreeze, which could be poured into traps and toilets before leaving, Holldber said.

The water heater could be vulnerable, Lyons noted. Both the cold and hot water pipes should be insulated. He also thought attention should be given to turning it off, if the house will be vacant for an extended period.

"Not only is it wasting energy, but if a pipe breaks or the tank leaks, it will go dry. Then an empty tank is

still being heated and could become a damaged water heater," Lyons said.

Checking the box where the district and the residential systems meet is another recommendation. The valves in the box can be insulated with sawdust to keep them from freezing, according to Lyons.

IWD sent a \$4,000 bill to a customer whose water pipes broke a few winters back.

"They used enough water for 50 homes," Lyons stated.

If homeowners do not live here or visit infrequently, it would be a good idea to have someone check on the house, Erler suggested.

J.P. Crumrine can be reached at jp@towncrier.

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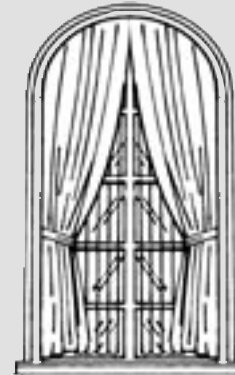
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**When the next disaster strikes,
ARE YOU READY?**



Owners must reduce vegetation around home

By Becky Clark
News Editor

The odds a person's home will be spared if a wildfire strikes the Idyllwild communities go up dramatically if defensible space is around the structure.

To help protect homes and to aid in fire suppression, property owners of developed and undeveloped private land in the mountains are required to keep the amount of wildfire fuel (vegetation) on their properties at a minimum year-round.

Specific laws were adopted so property owners know what is required.

Fire department personnel inspect properties usually in the spring and summer. If a property passes inspection, the property owner receives a notice of compliance. In Idyllwild, property owners are required to make their own first inspection.

If property inspection fails, the property owner receives a noncompliance notice specifying what needs to be corrected with about a month's time to do so. On the second inspection, if the property fails again, a non-compliance notice gives the property owner about two weeks to make corrections.

On the third inspection, if the property fails, a CalFire or Idyllwild Fire Department representative issues the property owner a citation and the issue is turned over to Riverside County Superior Court. In Idyllwild, the fire department may have a contractor abate the property and then bill the property owner for the work.

To help protect homes and keep people out of courts, Riverside County Fire Protection Ordinance 787 and Public Resources Code 4291 appear below:

Within 0-100 feet of structures located on, or adjoining vacant parcels

- Limb all established native trees, not ornamentals, brush or chaparral, up 1/3

of their height or 7 feet, whichever is less.

Within 10 feet of structures located on, or adjoining vacant parcels

- Clear pine needles, weeds and duff to mineral soil.

- Remove flammable chaparral (like manzanita and chamise) and dead trees.

- Remove live or dead tree branches within 10 feet of a chimney or stovepipe.

- Remove dead or dying tree branches that touch or overhang a structure. (Idyllwild Fire recommends that live branches fitting this category also be removed.)

Within 10-100 feet of structures located on, or adjoining vacant parcels

- Remove dead trees. (Riverside County rules state a maximum stump height of 12 inches.)

Clearances

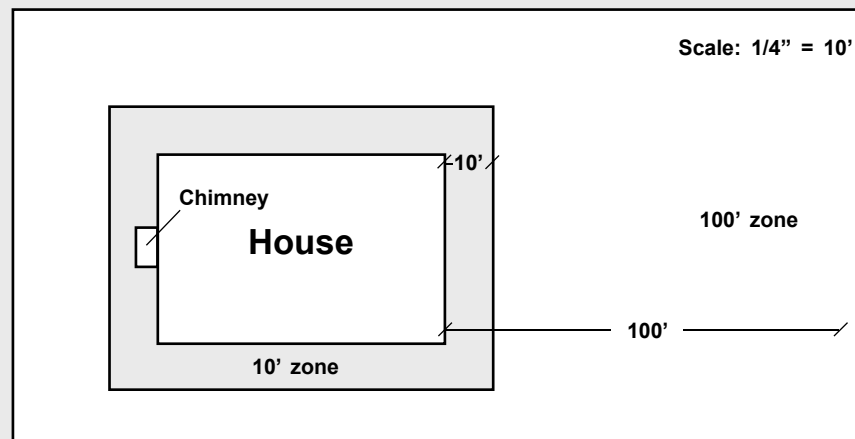
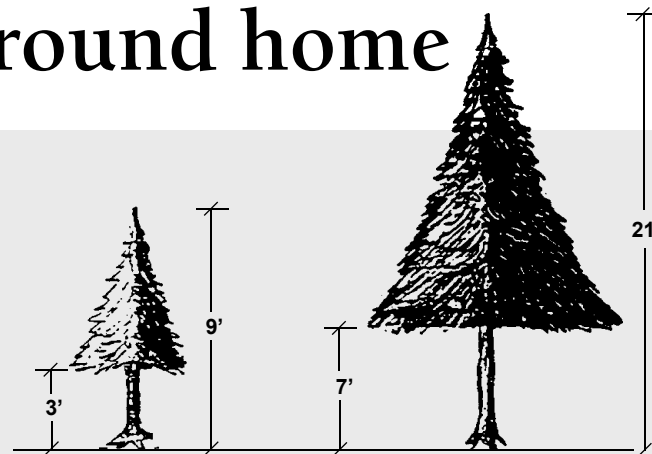
10' zone

- Clear pine needles, weeds and duff.
- Remove flammable chaparral and dead trees.
- Remove any tree branches within 10 feet of a chimney.
- Remove tree branches overhanging structure.

100' zone or to the property line, whichever is less

- Remove dead trees.
- Cut dead grass and weeds to ground level.
- Clear the ground surrounding any dead tree to mineral soil 10 feet in all directions.
- All pine needles, forest litter, weeds and duff should not exceed a depth of 2 inches.
- Keep the distance between brush and chaparral equal to the width of the widest adjacent plant. Remove dead native chaparral plants and dead limbs and twigs from the remaining plants.
- Limb all established native trees, not ornamentals, brush or chaparral, up 1/3 of their height or 7 feet, whichever is less.

- Cut dead grass and weeds to ground level.
 - All pine needles, forest litter, weeds and duff should not exceed a depth of 2 inches.
 - Keep the distance between brush and chaparral equal to the width of the widest adjacent plant.
- See Abatement, next page*



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Abatement

Continued from previous page

widest adjacent plant. Remove dead native chaparral plants and dead limbs and twigs from the remaining plants.

- Clear the ground surrounding any dead tree all the way down to the mineral soil at least 10 feet in all directions.

Other requirements for developed parcels

- Clear structure roofs of leaves, pine needles or other dead material.

- Cover chimney openings with 1/2-inch or less mesh wire screen. (Excessively small mesh may cause clogging.)

- Remove piles of flammable waste in yards, vacant lots or open space. Waste includes plant trimmings, grass, weeds, construction debris, rubbish or litter.

- Post street addresses clearly visible from the public street in numbers at least 3 inches high.

- Clear private easements for fire equipment access.

- Cover firewood piles within 10 feet of a house or under a deck with a tarp. Stacking firewood against a house is not recommended. Firewood may also be stored in a covered shed.

- Clear weeds, brush, trash or other combustible materials a minimum of 10 feet in all directions from all propane tanks or containers.

- Owners of unimproved property will provide fire clearance for adjacent neighbors if the adjacent property includes a structure and if that structure is within 100 feet of the common property line.

- From 10 to 100 feet from structures and for mulching purposes, homeowners can chip and spread cut woody materials over the ground — no more than 2 inches deep — for soil erosion protection and to prevent the growth of annual grasses.

Becky Clark can be reached at itc@towncrier.com.

Tips for keeping your home safe from wildfires

By Marshall Smith
Staff Reporter

Experts in fire protection recommend a simple approach to increasing your home's likelihood of surviving a wildfire: Begin work in, on and close to the house and work outward.

In and on the home:

- Replace existing siding with fire-resistant siding (class III or better), if possible.

- If not possible, annually inspect combustible siding, such as wood panels and clapboard for gaps, making sure they're filled with a high-quality caulk to prevent hot embers from taking up residence and beginning to burn.

- Consider installing residential sprinklers.

- Enclose the underside of eaves, balconies and above-ground decks with fire-resistant materials.

- Replace single-pane with dual- or triple-pane win-

dows. "With dual pane windows, the outer pane protects the inner pane," said Stephen Quarles, University of California Extension wood durability advisor. "The inner pane heats up more slowly and uniformly and, therefore, may not break even though the outer pane does."

- Use tempered glass, which is much stronger than regular glass.

- Consider adding a low-emissivity (Low-E) coating to your windows to help them reflect infrared and ultraviolet light and heat rays.

- Consider affixing metal shutters that swing in to protect your windows in a wildfire. Fire experts state that metal shutters could add another 10 to 20 minutes of survival time to your windows, all that might be necessary to keep them from breaking and admitting embers.

- Make sure that electric service lines, fuse boxes and circuit breaker panels are installed and maintained as

prescribed by code.

- Ensure that your roof has the highest ignition resistant grade (Class A) of compositional material: asphalt shingles, slate, clay tile, and metal offer the best protection. "The importance of the roof covering cannot be overstated," said Quarles.

- Cover exterior attic, soffit and underfloor vents with metal wire mesh, no larger than 1/8 of an inch. This will help, in the event of fire, to keep sparks from entering your home. "We know that vents offer an easy entry point for burning embers and flames," said Quarles. "Embers that slip through attic vents can ignite debris and items stored there, and subsequently construction materials, setting the house ablaze."

- Assure you have a source of water. The most effective way to do this is to have a storage tank on the property with a rolled-up garden hose attached to an outside connection of the tank.

Outside the home:

- Create defensible space of 100 feet around your home.

- Create a lean, clean and green zone by removing all flammable vegetation within 30 feet immediately surrounding your home.

- Remove all vegetation beneath large trees.

- Limb up trees to 12 feet above the ground.

- Landscape, if you must, with fire-resistant plants.

- Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures.

- Remove dead vegetation, dry grass, leaves and tree branches, and don't forget to regularly check roofs and gutters to remove pine needles and other vegetation.

saster packs, pets (in carriers if possible, since even the most highly trained can become skittish in an emergency) and family members into a car when ordered by fire officials to evacuate and evacuate only along the prescribed route or routes.

- Remove flammable furniture from the yard and deck, either indoors or at a greater distance from the house.

- Close all windows and doors, leaving doors unlocked.

- Move furniture and combustible draperies away from windows.

- Shut off the main propane or gas line to the house.

As wildfire approaches:

- Transfer heirlooms, di-

E-mail Marshall Smith at marshall@towncrier.com.

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