



**FIREWISE USA™**  
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS



**Fire Safe Council**  
FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

## STEPS TO BECOMING A FIREWISE USA® COMMUNITY.

### 1. Form a Firewise Board or Committee

Form a board or committee that is comprised of residents and other applicable wildfire stakeholders. Consider inviting the local fire department, firesafe council, elected officials, emergency managers, and if applicable, the HOA, Neighborhood Association, or property management company to participate. This group will collaborate to develop the community's risk reduction priorities, develop a multi-year action plan based on the risk assessment and oversee the completion of the annual renewal requirements needed to retain an "in good standing" status.

### 2. Create a Wildfire Risk Assessment

Your Firewise committee will work together to write a wildfire risk assessment as the first step in becoming a nationally recognized Firewise USA® community. By following the template below, completing the assessment is a relatively easy process and will help your committee better understand the fire problem in your community. The assessment is an important piece of the Firewise USA® application process that will help identify and guide your priorities and activities. The risk assessment will be the board or committee's primary tool in determining the risk reduction priorities within your site's boundaries. Assessments need to be updated every five years.

The Firewise USA program is voluntary. Everyone within the site's boundary will benefit, whether they actively participate or not. While a community risk assessment is part of the requirement for a Firewise USA® application, individual home assessments by the Firewise committee are not mandatory. The community risk assessment is intended to document overall, global/neighborhood conditions visible from common areas, but the Firewise committee won't be looking over fences or into backyards. When visible from common areas, the assessment may look at roofing types, general building construction and condition, and general vegetation conditions to help come up with strategies to reduce neighborhood risk. While there are defensible space and vegetation management requirements in the fire code, this assessment is not about code enforcement and the assessment itself does not carry any penalties. It will be used only to help inform future risk reduction strategies.

Learn more about the risk assessment process by taking the online [Firewise Risk Assessment Training](#)

Ready to complete your assessment? Download the [Firewise USA® Risk Assessment Template](#) (PDF)

### 3. Develop an Action Plan

Your board/committee will develop an action plan – a prioritized list of risk reduction projects/ investments for the participating site, along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years. Action plans should be updated at a minimum of at least every three years.

### 4. Conduct Educational Outreach

Host an outreach event and work with neighbors on addressing items in the action plan. These efforts will go towards your site's annual wildfire risk reduction investment. At a minimum, each site is required to annually invest the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in wildfire risk reduction actions. If your site has identified 100 homes within its boundary, 100 hours of work or the monetary equivalent value of volunteer time needs to be invested towards the Action Plan for that year.

[Find examples](#) (PDF) of activities that count towards your investment.

Use the [volunteer hourly worksheet](#) (PDF) to collect information from residents in your community.

NOTE – Firewise USA Sites are NOT required to invest or pay any cash to meet the risk reduction investment obligation. Your volunteer time, and the time spent by homeowners clearing their property, counts toward the investment. Look at it this way: each homeowner must invest and document ONE HOUR of work towards reducing wildfire risk. That's it!

### 5. Application

You may start an application at any point in the overall process by creating a site profile in the [Firewise USA™ portal](#). Once all the criteria have been completed, the electronic application can be submitted.

**[For additional information or assistance](#)**  
**Please contact Richard Bates at [firewise.fscmc@gmail.com](mailto:firewise.fscmc@gmail.com)**  
**or visit [www.firesafemonterey.org](http://www.firesafemonterey.org)**

## Why be Firewise?

In California, millions of homes sit precariously within wildfire risk areas. Last year alone, 9,917 incidents burned nearly 4.3 million acres and 10,488 structures — mostly in the state's remote, rural areas. No longer a seasonal event, the threat of wildfire is now yearlong in California. To help mitigate this increasingly urgent threat, the nonprofit Fire Safe Council For Monterey County (FSCMC) [firesafemonterey.org](http://firesafemonterey.org) serves local communities and individual property owners by creating awareness, presenting information, facilitating access to available resources and providing assistance with coordinating efforts to better prepare for wildfire. FSCMC has joined forces with the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA® recognition program to help neighbors to reduce wildfire risks at the local level. The Fire Safe Council congratulates two neighborhoods in Carmel Valley for becoming the first Firewise USA®-**recognized** communities in Monterey County, Robles del Rio and Rancho Tierra Grande. Benefits of becoming a Firewise Community include:

### **Get a framework for action**

A neighborhood will organize a board or committee to oversee the process, obtain a wildfire risk assessment with an action plan, and host an outreach event to inform neighbors on how to make their homes and properties safer during wildfire season. The criteria help get a community started toward annual, systematic action to reduce their risks from brush, grass and forest fires.

### **Learn about wildfire**

As people go through the process, they learn about wildfire risks in the community and the simple things they can do to reduce them. They connect with experts – local fire fighters, state forestry professionals, and national researchers – to continue to learn about fire and find resources to accomplish fire-safe actions.

### **Get peace of mind**

Knowing that they are using the best information available and actually taking steps to reduce the risk of damage from fire helps people start to feel safer in their environment and in their homes. Having a plan for what to do in the event of a fire helps people become calmer and more prepared to act quickly.

### **Community-building**

As neighbors get together to do work, often meeting one another for the first time, they build a stronger bond with each other. This strengthening of community ties can benefit residents in many ways and is especially helpful during an emergency or an evacuation.

### **Access to funding and assistance**

Preference is sometimes given to Firewise USA® sites over other candidates when allocations of grant money are made for wildfire safety or fuel mitigation. The reason is that there are invariably more requests than available funds when grants are available through state or federal agencies. If requests are equally worthy, some officials tend to have more confidence in communities that have demonstrated the foresight of becoming a recognized Firewise USA® site.

### **Insurance discount for USAA members in certain states**

The Departments of Insurance in the states of California, Colorado, Texas, Arizona, Oregon, New Mexico and Utah have approved filings to give homeowners insurance discounts to USAA members living in communities recognized by the Firewise USA® program [firewise.org](http://firewise.org)