Information from Fire Department Increased Awareness

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

San Diego County, California

Rancho Bernardo, CA - Bette Blankenship became familiar with defensible space and other ways to mitigate her property from the effects of wildfires through brochures her children brought home from school. The brochures came from San Diego's fire department, which was in the process of providing information about fire prevention and mitigation to students at schools in the Rancho Bernardo area. After she read the materials, Blankenship knew she had to take action, and did.

Thus, when the raging inferno known as the Witch Fire approached, she and her family were ready. At that, the blaze severely affected her neighborhood in October of 2007. "I can't believe that we did not lose our home and more homes on our street," said Blankenship.

She is convinced that the type of materials used in upgrading her home, the removal of trees and plants prone to burn and spread fire, and the expansive back yard that serves as defensible space saved her home, while homes directly across the street were lost.

When Blankenship and her family moved to their home in 1998, the lower portion of their .75-acre property was covered with avocado and citrus trees. After learning about fuel modification, Blankenship and her husband, Gregg, started removing the hazardous trees from their back yard. The effort took three years at a cost of $7,000. Bette started planting fire-resistant plants in 2002 before the Cedar Fire of 2003. Ice plant and other fire-resistant plants of a variety of species now cover their back-yard.

The Witch Fire in October 2007, which devastated much of their neighborhood, started near Santa Ysabel and spread to Ramona, Rancho Bernardo, Poway and Escondido. Burning embers, driven by powerful winds generated by Santa Ana conditions, flew over Interstate 15, spawning fires west of the highway. The Witch Fire continued west, causing significant damage in Lake Hodges, Del Dios, West Rancho Bernardo, and parts of Rancho Santa Fe.

Far and away the biggest of 24 wildland fires that burned in the seven-county disaster area in Southern California, the Witch Fire caused two deaths and injured 40 firefighters, according to Cal Fire, the state's fire agency.

A total of 1,125 homes and 509 outbuildings were destroyed, another 77 homes and 25 outbuildings were damaged, and, altogether, 197,990 acres were burned.

The Rancho Bernardo subdivision was heavily impacted by the Witch Fire. According to the City of San Diego, more than 300 homes were destroyed and damaged in the area.

The Blankenship home, constructed in 1978, has concrete roof tiles, stucco walls, enclosed eaves, double pane windows, and the fences and wood on exteriors are treated with heat-resistant materials.

Although their home sustained little damage, the Blankenships continue to think about what they will do in the future, saying mitigation techniques will continue. The next thing the family plans to do is replace other trees in front of the house with less flammable, more fire-resistant species.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area:	**Single County in a State**
FEMA Region:	**Region IX**
State:	**California**
County:	**San Diego County**
City/Community:	**San Diego**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector:	**Private**
Hazard Type:	**Fire; Wildfire**
Activity/Project Type:	**Vegetation Management**
Activity/Project Start Date:	**01/2002**
Activity/Project End Date:	**Ongoing**
Funding Source:	**Homeowner**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost:	**$7,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster?	**No**
Value Tested By Disaster?	**Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #:	**1731 , 10/24/2007**
Repetitive Loss Property?	**No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1:	**http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/howto/how2002.shtm**
Reference URL 2:	**http://www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/index.shtm**

Main Points

- After reading brochures that her children brought home from school about mitigating one's home, Bette Blankenship she had to take action, and did.
- She is convinced that the type of materials used in upgrading her home, the removal of trees and plants prone to burn and spread fire, and the expansive back yard that serves as defensible space saved her home from the Witch Fire in 2007.
- After learning about fuel modification, Blankenship and her husband, Gregg, started removing the hazardous trees from their back yard.
- Bette started planting fire-resistant plants in 2002 before the Cedar Fire of 2003.
- The Blankenship home, constructed in 1978, has concrete roof tiles, stucco walls, enclosed eaves, double pane windows, and the fences and wood on exteriors are treated with heat-resistant materials.
- Although their home sustained little damage, the Blankenships continue to think about what they will do in the future, saying mitigation techniques will continue.

Carefully planned defensible space helped save her home.

Lots across the street from her home were cleared of debris and slabs so new houses could be built.

Multiple mitigation for fire resistance