Winter's rains = summer's fire danger ... **Below** *Do your backyard plants help or harm?...* **Page 3**

The District 3 Slate

Special FireSafe San Diego edition! County Supervisor Pam Slater

Fire alert! El Nino rains lead to "El Fuego" this fire season

Heavy rains have created more fuel

As the county's hotter months approach, fire officials across the region are urging property owners to be especially vigilant this summer about protecting their homes against wildfires.

Last winter's heavy El Nino rains promoted the growth of bushes, shrubs and native vegetation in the region's canyons and foothills.

Heavier-than-normal rainfall caused vegetation around the county to be thicker than normal.

During a wildfire, it is this vegetation that provides fuel, say fire officials.

As a result of the heavy rains, there will be more fuel for fires, if a wildfire strikes.

Danger: *This Elfin Forest home survived the threat of this wildfire. Fire officials are alerting homeowners this summer to take every step to protect their homes against possible fires.*

Photo by Ginny English

To help residents statewide be safer from fire, the California Department of Forestry, along with the state and local FireSafe Councils, have launched "El Fuego", a statewide program to educate homeowners on how to protect themselves from potential wildfires.

"We know that the hot and dry weather of the coming summer months will dry the vegetation and provide ideal fuel for wildfires," said Richard Wilson, director of the California Department of Forestry.

"Just as people fortified against El Nino, we need them to prepare for fire season. A few simple steps could mean the difference of a life or the safety of your home," Wilson added.

The total of California homes lost each year, on average, to wildfire costs $163 million.

"We can cut those losses,"

See **El Fuego** *on back page ...*

What is FireSafe San Diego

It was October 1996. The Harmony Grove fire was finally out, burning more than 8,600 acres in North County. It was the most destructive fire in the county's history.

Pam Slater

Fire officials recognized they must educate the public more about fire safety. They approached San Diego County for help.

Supervisors Pam Slater and Bill Horn responded.

Bill Horn

As one of many actions, they won approval of a proposal which directed the county's Office of Disaster Preparedness to work with the San Diego County Fire Chiefs Association and create the San Diego FireSafe Council, a coalition of public and private organizations that share a common, vested interest in preventing wildfires and reducing the damage they cause.

FireSafe San Diego is comprised of members from state and local fire agencies, the insurance industry, the building industry and government.

It works to educate the public, to seek legislative changes that promote fire safety, and to coordinate efforts and combine expertise on reducing the dangers from all types of fires.

How you can defend your home against wildfire threats

So you've recognized that your home with its canyon view could be at risk during a wildfire. You've decided to protect your home as best you can. What steps do you take?

According to fire officials, the first place you should look is above.

The installation of a Class A fire-resistant roof is the first step homeowners should take to make their homes safer from fire, according to the San Diego County Fire Chiefs Association.

Homeowners with wood-shake shingle roofs should replace their existing roofs with more fire-resistant materials.

County fire chiefs urge homeowners to choose non-combustible roofing materials like tile, fiber cement, clay or asphalt shingles when they replace a roof.

County Supervisor Pam Slater says personal experience showed her how much of a difference a roof could make.

"The day after the 1996 Harmony Grove fire, I toured the destruction caused by that fire," said Slater. "I vividly remember

See **Defend** *on page two ...*

El Fuego:

said San Diego County Supervisor Pam Slater. "But we need every homeowner to take all the steps they can to protect their property."

The insurance industry is supporting the El Fuego effort and encourages its customers to take advantage of the fire safe information, say insurance representatives.

"For most people, the purchase of a home is the biggest investment of their lifetime," said Candysse Miller of Western Insurance Information Service.

Radio:

the load placed on it by the large number of units at the incident."

"At times, safety agencies were unable to communicate with each other at all."

Added Willis: "In that fire, 127 structures were consumed and one life was lost. It is very possible that with the 800 Mhz radio system, the losses would not have been as great."

CTN show wins awards

A County Television Network (CTN) production on fire safety has garnered a first place award.

"FireSafe Communities", created by CTN with assistance from Jo-San Arnold of the Rancho Santa Fire Department, won first place in the Public/Community Meeting division of the SCAN/NATOA awards.

The awards recognize outstanding community television in Southern California and Nevada.

The Regional Communications System will include the county's unincorporated area; the cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach, Encinitas, Carlsbad, Vista, San Marcos, Poway, Santee, Lemon Grove and Imperial Beach.

It also will include 26 different fire agencies from across the county.

Under the new regional system, fire agencies will be able to better coordinate firefighting efforts.

In addition, the Regional 800 Mhz system will have a computer-aided dispatch center and an automatic vehicle location system.

Insurance:

zones with a critical fire hazard and those with a lesser fire hazard.

Out of 365 home inspections, 71 percent were fire safe, 16 percent required some changes, and only 13 percent were found to be uninsurable.

Fireman's Fund future plan is to pre-inspect all new homes.

Aftermath: *At left, a house shows how a wood-shake shingle roof can be a fire's starting point. Below, a family cleans debris after a fire in Elfin Forest.*

Photos by Jo-San Arnold

Roofs, roads:

3.) Ask these contractors to submit a bid, which includes completing the form "Application for Work by Architect, Engineer or Contractor."

4.) Contact the references provided in the contractor's completed application.

To answer questions about roofing materials and installation, San Diego County residents can the San Diego Roofing Contractors Association at (619) 283-1225.

On roads, fire officials emphasize it's important for rural homeowners to properly maintain their private roads.

Homeowners must ensure the roadway is wide enough to handle an evacuating car and an entering fire truck.

Roads must be marked with clearly visible signs. Your address must be easy to see from the street. If necessary, post it at your driveway entrance and on your home. The numbers should be at least 4 inches high on a contrasting background.

County Supervisor Pam Slater
District Three
1600 Pacific Highway, Room 335
San Diego, CA. 92101

In Theory ... *and in Practice ...*

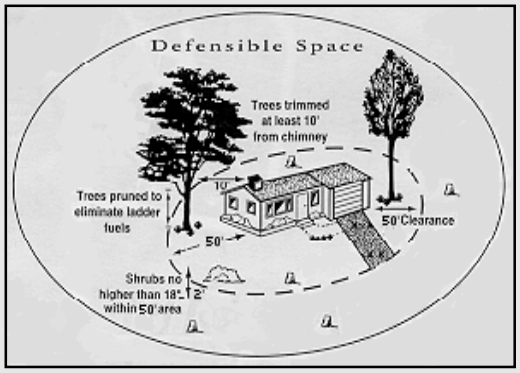

Photo by Jo-San Arnold

Safe from harm: *Acres of burnt land completely surround the house in the photo at right, demonstrating that a proper roof and a defensible landscape, as illustrated at left, can make the difference during a wildfire.*

Defend: Make your home safer from the threat of a wildfire by proper landscaping

seeing how fire-resistant roofs saved homes," she said. "A house with a tile roof would be saved, while the one next door -- with a wood shingle roof -- would be ashes."

After putting in place a fire-resistant roof, your next step is to create what's known as a "defensible landscape," according to fire officials.

Defensible space doesn't mean a ring of dirt around your home.

It does mean using fire-resistant plants that are strategically planted to resist the spread of fire. Take these steps:

- Keep trees farthest from your house, shrubs can be closer, and bedding plants and lawns are nearest the house.
- To establish a defensible space, clear all dry grass, brush and dead leaves at least 50 feet from your home, and at least 200 feet if you are on a hill.
- Space trees so they will be at least 10 feet apart when fully grown. Keep branches trimmed 10 feet away from the roof.
- For mature trees, prune any branches within six feet of the ground. This prevents ground fires from spreading to tree tops.
- For shrubs, keep them no higher than 18 inches to 2 feet high within the 50-foot circle you have cleared around your home. Install fire-resistant plants, such as the ones listed in this newsletter.
- Lastly, remember to stack firewood at least 30 feet away from any structure.

Roofs, roads play key role

Call them the two R's of fire resistance.

Your roof and your road play an important part in defending your property against the threat of a wildfire.

For roofs, the Committee for Firesafe Roofing encourages homeowners to consider only roofing materials with a Class A fire resistance rating. These materials have the highest fire resistance and last the longest.

To select the best roofing material, the Committee for Firesafe Roofing recommends these steps:

1.) Once you've decided on a roofing material, ask the local manufacturer's representative to provide you with addresses where it has been installed.

2.) Ask the materials local manufacturer's representative or distributor to provide you with a list of three local contractors who have experience installing the material you have chosen.

See **Roofs, Roads** *on back page ...*

Quail Gardens firesafe plants

Where do you go to find out what fire-resistant plants look like?

The Quail Botanical Gardens in Encinitas features a Firescape Demonstration Garden that has plants with low water needs and moderate-to-high fire resistance.

The firescape garden shows how a landscape design can reduce the risk of fire damage to a home. The great majority of the selection is available at local nurseries. Quail Gardens is at 230 Quail Gardens Drive in Encinitas.

With $885 million at risk, you insure carefully

Because of significant losses in recent years, some fire insurance companies are evaluating how they choose to insure property in areas with the potential for major fires.

One such evaluation is underway in Rancho Santa Fe with the Fireman's Fund company.

According to Kelly Yarnell, a company representative, the potential exists for tremendous losses. Fireman's Fund insures 365 homes in Rancho Santa Fe with $885 million at risk.

In the past, the goal was to reduce the insurance companies' exposure in the area, and little was done to recommend changes a community could make to make their homes safer from fire.

But Fireman's Fund wanted a proactive program in Rancho Santa Fe, and began first by developing a close relationship with the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department, according to Yarnell.

Photo by Stuart Resor, AIA

A combustile mix: *Looking north to Olivenhain from Camino Del Norte, a wildfire approaches a residential area. Fire officials remind urban homeowners that they should protect their property just as much as rural homeowners.*

Instead of reducing a part of the liability exposure in Rancho Santa Fe, Fireman's Fund made recommendations to local homeowners to make their homes safer from fire.

The insurance company's Inspection Team worked with the fire department to develop inspection zones, identifying

See **Insurance** *on back page ...*

Photo by Ginny English

Helicopter drop: *Firefighters try to prevent a wall of fire from burning an Elfin Forest home as a helicopter drops a load of water. Fire officials emphasize that radio communication among agencies is critical during emergencies.*

Regional radio system vital to fire agencies

When fire threatens, homeowners want the fire out as quickly as possible. They don't want anything to prevent the efforts of firefighters.

"But in some recent San Diego County fires, the lack of a regional radio system has prevented firefighters on one truck from directly talking with firefighters on another truck," said Supervisor Pam Slater.

Recognizing the importance of communications during such emergencies, San Diego County along with many local cities and fire agencies have joined to create the Regional 800 Mhz Communications System.

The system will link all the agencies on a common radio network, enabling them to directly talk to each other during emergencies, said Chief Erwin Willis of the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Department.

"The lack of a countywide integrated radio system places both firefighters and law enforcement officers at an extreme disadvantage when fighting either a fire or a crime," Willis said.

"The Harmony Grove fire was a prime example of how inadequate our current radio system is," Willis added. "During the fire, the current radio system completely broke down under

See **Radio** *on back page ...*

A key to Fire-resistant plants vs. *Pyro*phtes

Fire-resistant --These plants also tend to have certain typical characteristics.

* Most are broad-leaf deciduous trees.
* Leaves tend to be supple, moist and easily crushed.
* Trees tend to be clean, not bushy and have little deadwood.
* Shrubs are low-growing (2 foot) with minimal dead material.
* Tall shrubs are clean, not bushy.
* Sap is water-like and typically does not have a strong odor.

***Pyro*phtes** -- Plants that ignite readily and burn intensely.

* Usually blade-leaf or needle-leaf evergreens.
* Leaves are stiff, woody, small or fine/lacey.
* Leaves and wood usually contain volatile waxes, terpenes or oils.
* Often aromatic (crushed leaves have strong odors.)
* Sap is usually gummy, resinous and has a strong odor.
* Usually contain plentiful fine, twiggy, dry or dead materials.
* May have pubescent (hair covered) leaves.
* May have loose or papery bark.
* They are cured and dry.
* Water-stressed plants that are in poor condition are more pyrophytic.
* Plants that flame (not smolder) when preheated and ignited with a match.

Which plants help or hurt

Fire resistant

Research has shown some plants to be relatively non-flammable. This chart lists plants which are fire resistant.

COMMON NAME

Aeonium Decorum
Arabian Scurfpea
Bladder Pod
Cottonleaf
Creeping Saltbush
Dwarf Coyote Bush
Green Lavender-Cotton
Gum Rockrose
Hairy Yerba Santa
Jade Plant
Mediterranean Saltbush
Rose Geranium
Small-leafed Ice Plant
White Rockrose

Undesirable

Fire officials say these plants and weeds should be avoided near a home. If homeowners have these plants or weeds within 100 feet of their home, they should take them away.

COMMON NAME

Chamise
Red Shanks
Mayweed
California Sagebrush
Giant Cane
Wild Turnip, Yellow Mustard
Black Mustard
Hoary Cress
Perennial Peppergrasss
Wild Artichoke
Horseweed
Pampas Grass
Scotch Broom, French Broom
Common Buckwheat
Telegraph plant
Prickly Lettuce
Indian Tobacco
Tree Tobacco
Russian Thistle or Tumbleweed
Black Sage