

## COLUMNS

# Notes From SEFD: Fire Safe Property



by Eddie McArthur

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A good example of a fire safe home in Sonoita. Photo by Eddie McArthur

What does a fire safe property actually look like?

There are multiple factors. Natural terrain and vegetation play a role. The amount of work, time, and/or funds a property owner wants to invest is a big part. Here's a look at two very different properties with successful preparation.

Just a mile from the fire station, Annie and Steve Przybyla's home sits atop a small hill surrounded by native trees and other vegetation. They've seen several fires since living here and were evacuated during the Papago fire. After that, they determined to make their home as fire safe as possible.

Vegetation has been removed around the home and replaced with hard surfaces—in some places gravel and others concrete. All the trees have been trimmed up and underlying grass kept short. Brush has been removed or trimmed well away from the home. Annie tends to areas right around the house, and Steve rides the tractor to mow as much as possible. He also uses a string trimmer under trees and fences.

Possible points for sparks to gain entry to the home have been closed off. Vegetation around outbuildings has been removed or is kept trimmed. Any new planting is done well away from buildings. There's a generator to provide power in case a fire shuts off electricity.

The Przybylas' property has taken on a park-like appearance that does not detract from it being fire safe. Being near the fire station is good both for homeowner confidence and insurance rates.

Out about nine miles from the fire station and a mile off Highway 83 is an entirely different property. There, trees are scarce, winds blow unobstructed, and fires can sweep through quickly. The property is near "Lightning Ridge," and the homeowners have seen a number of lightning-ignited grass fires.



The owners of this home in Sonoita decided to create a property in which they could shelter in place in the event of fire. Photo by Eddie McArthur

These retired homeowners decided to create a property in which they could shelter in place in the event of fire. The house has cement board siding, with a large custom glass door covering the decorative wood front door. All wood posts are kept sealed, and attic openings are covered in fine wire screening.

A commercial landscaping company was hired to dig out everything out to about 20 feet from the house. Two layers of heavy poly were placed and covered with rock. The few plants edging that area are cactus or other burn-resistant types.

A fully metal barn was added, is sealed all around, and is large enough to house all the vehicles owned. Metal screening has been used to fully surround the chicken coop as well as a storage area.

The property is essentially all electric, and the owners have installed a propane generator and smaller propane tank some distance from the house. This will automatically kick in if electricity is cut. It powers not only the well pump but also a high tech air filtration system in the house. Three large water tanks are part of a water capture system. When these homeowners asked a fire inspector to look at the property and tell them if they could shelter in place there, he said he might join them in the event of a fire. Creating a fire-resistant property can help with insurance rates, especially this distance out from the fire station.

Not all of us can create a property safe enough to shelter in place, but we can all take steps to make our property more fire-safe.

Remember that **SEFD** will do free assessments of the fire readiness of your home. And SEFD has copies of the Wildland Fire Action Guide from the 'Ready, Set, Go!' program available at the station to guide you.

