

## COLUMNS

# Let's Talk Prevention



by Eddie McArthur  
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The tree has been pruned, brush removed, and weeds and grass kept trimmed to reduce the danger of wildfire destroying the columnist's home. Photo by Eddie McArthur

Not all fires can be prevented. Lightning strikes are a frequent source of ignition in our climate, and all we can do is fight those fires. Some fires, however, are preventable. Fire codes provide rules that even those of us in rural areas are expected to follow. The Firewise USA program provides information and guidance on how to protect your property. Let's look at both.

Our area is governed by the 2018 International Fire Code. (If you are interested, check out [codes.iccsafe.org/content/IFC2018](https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IFC2018)) Some highlights pertinent to our area include smoke detectors (you should have them), visible identification of addresses (required), regulations regarding propane (applicable to food trucks too) and access to property (do you have a locked gate?).

New construction is required to meet the pertinent fire codes, commercial or residential, and some remodeling projects will also bring new codes into play. Inspections are required. A good contractor should be cognizant of what is required.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is also helpful if you are doing your own construction; go to [DFFM.az.gov](http://DFFM.az.gov). To arrange an inspection, call the fire department non-emergency number, 520-455-5854, or email [meredith@sefd911.org](mailto:meredith@sefd911.org).

SEFD adopted amendments to the 2018 code in 2022 that are specific to our area. Open burning requires a permit. The local amendment authorizes the fire department to extinguish any open burning that is not permitted or that is hazardous, such as too close to structures or during windy weather.

“Premises Identification” was brought into line with Santa Cruz County code and requires new and existing buildings to have address numbers or other identifiers visible from the road. All new and existing commercial structures are required to have key boxes.

Firewise USA is a program of the National Fire Protection Association. The program addresses how homeowners can protect their property in the event of a fire. Information is research based and begins with simple suggestions such as cleaning gutters. They utilize “zones” in defining what is recommended. The closer to structures, the less “fuel” should be available.

SEFD does Firewise assessments without cost and will complete removal of vegetation, etc., at a very reasonable cost.

Last year my household took advantage of this. The above photo is of our property. The large tree has been trimmed up and smaller scrub brush removed below it to prevent the ladder effect of fire climbing from grass to brush to trees. The planting bed is located away from structures, and all grass/weeds are kept trimmed. This was done throughout our property.

While we aren’t guaranteed to be safe from fire, chances of our home surviving have been improved.