

New Neighborhood Voice

www.NNVESJ.org

Santa Clara County FireSafe Council

Not just for professional firefighters!

What is it? What does it do? Is it for you?

NNV has mentioned the Santa Clara FireSafe Council in several articles now. You may be wondering what it is and what it does and why we can't decide whether to put "County" in the name or not. This group might interest you if the potential for wildfires in our neighborhood worries you and you'd like to lend your efforts to making the foothills safer from fire.

The Santa Clara FireSafe Council is a County-wide, non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve California's natural and man-made resources by mobilizing the people of Santa Clara County to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities "Fire Safe." The council is focused on fire prevention in Wildland Interface Areas (like our neighborhoods) and does not get involved in promoting smoke detectors and other local fire department issues. Since the council is a non-profit organization, it is eligible for grants that would not be available to either its member organizations or to individuals.

The council's members include fire fighting and protection organizations like the CDF (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection), the Santa Clara County Fire Department and the San Jose Fire Department and several other city and volunteer fire departments in the County. Other organizations that are members of the council include the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the Santa Clara Santa Clara County Open Space Authority and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (yes, we have two "open space" organizations covering different parts of Santa Clara County).

Other local government departments are also involved, such as Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation and San Jose Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services. Large companies like PG&E are also members.

The council is not just for professionals - several homeowners associations and individual homeowners are members or officers (including your editor and her husband). Homeowners, residents and representatives of all interested organizations are welcome to attend the meetings.

The council received three 2003 and 2004 grants from the Bureau of Land Management. One is for a Hazardous Fuel Assessment and Strategy project which should lead to a plan for a County-wide assessment and strategy for hazardous fire areas and conditions. Maybe you're surprised that there isn't a County-wide plan now? Remember that there are more than ten fire departments and associations that are in or serve Santa Clara County. San Jose Fire Department is the largest with 31 stations - and it is responsible for large areas outside the City limits (like our neighborhoods, where the County contracts with the City for fire protection). And you may be surprised to hear that there are large, fire-prone areas of the County that do not have any assigned fire-protection organization unless they form their own volunteer fire department. The CDF does cover the whole County but their focus is on forest, range, and watershed areas - not individual homes - and the Santa Clara CDF unit has to cover five counties! All of

these government agencies have serious funding limitations and the FireSafe Council is the place where they can get together to coordinate County-wide projects.

The other grants the council received are for Community Outreach and Education. This is how the council and its member organizations fulfill their mission to "mobilize the people of Santa Clara County to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities 'Fire Safe.'" If you were at the YSI Wildlife Festival in Alum Rock Park on October 12, 2003, you saw the CDF, San Jose Fire Department, PG&E and other council members in action - maybe your kid climbed on the SJFD Shark Engine? If not, you missed a wild time, but you can read about it in the November, 2003, edition of NNV.

The council also helps organize real fuel reduction projects and plans to do more of this in the future. One example was the Loma Chiquita Fuel Reduction project in 2003 - near where the big Croy/Uvas fire was in late 2002. The council and its member organizations also helped the

new Uvas Volunteer Fire Department to get started in that area.

The Santa Clara FireSafe Council meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 10:00 AM. Meetings are held at fire stations and other members' facilities. You're welcome to attend! Check the Web site at www.SCCFireSafe.org for the location of the next meeting and directions.

Before you say that this organization isn't for you, please remember that we live in a Wildland Interface Area - and think about the late 2003 fires in Southern California and remember that October 20, 2004 will be the *thirteenth* anniversary of the Oakland Hills fire, "the worst fire involving loss of life and property since the Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906" (Oakland Hills: 25 deaths, 150 injuries, over 3,000 homes or apartments destroyed, 1,520 acres, \$1.5 *Billion*). Then come to our FireSafe Council meetings to help prevent something like that from happening here.

For more information, call us at (408) 975-9591 or visit the Santa Clara FireSafe Council Web site at www.SCCFireSafe.org.

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Copyright© 2003-2004 by Judy Thompson, 16174 Highland Drive, San Jose, CA 95127
Phone: (408) 272-7008, E-mail: JudyET@NNVESJ.org Fax: (408) 272-4040
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