

Fire safety group urges residents to get a jump start

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With persistent snow and wet weather punishing Carson City residents this month, summer might seem like a long way off.

But for the North Carson chapter of the Nevada Fire Safe Council, it won't be long before wildfire season arrives.

"Now is the time to start preparing and to do what you can to create defensible space around your home," said Paul Pugsley, chapter member and north Carson City resident. "As far as I'm concerned, it's an absolute necessity."

Members of the newly formed chapter, concerned that a wet winter will accelerate vegetation growth, made plans this month for two work weekends. Residents can remove brush, dead or dry vegetation, downed tree branches and other material from their yards.

The first work period, scheduled for last weekend, was canceled due to weather. Residents at the north end of the city will have another opportunity March 25-26.

The Carson City Fire Department plans to bring in two Dumpsters where residents can dispose of vegetation free of charge.

"There's been a lot of precipitation this winter, and that means there's going to be extensive plant growth," said Lesley Bensinger, Waterfall Fire project assistant for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. "It's important to dispose of vegetation before the weather changes to hot and dry" and the wildfire threat intensifies.

Cooperative Extension is supporting Nevada Fire Safe Council efforts to assist local chapters prepare neighborhoods for the fire season.

Before the Waterfall Fire scorched the western mountains and foothills of Carson City in July 2004, destroying 17 homes, only one council chapter existed in the community. Today, there are six, including North Carson, which was organized at the first of the year.

Pat Murphy, Sierra project coordinator for the council, said the Waterfall Fire raised awareness that neighborhoods need to band together to create fire-protection strategies. This interest has extended to other areas, and Murphy said 47 chapters operate in the state, with funding for projects provided through state legislation.

Several chapters are defining plans to get ready for the 2006 fire season, Murphy said.

For the North Carson chapter, Pugsley said brush-covered Bureau of Land Management land near homes is a major concern among residents.

The chapter's boundaries are north of Arrowhead Drive and east of U.S. 395, and includes more than 600 privately owned parcels.

A fire break is tentatively scheduled to be constructed across BLM land in the spring.

Pugsley said this time of year is ideal for trimming trees and removing other vegetation.

"The ground is wet so this is the easiest time to pull up sagebrush. It's a lot harder if you wait until June," Pugsley said.