



Residents increase fire safety

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If last year's Waterfall fire did anything, it reminded western Nevada's foothill communities they're in what land managers call an urban interface area - wildlife and wildfire territory - and it spurred many of them to do something about it.

Since its inception in 1999, the Nevada Fire Safe Council helped form 19 neighborhood council chapters that looked to fire-proof their communities as much as possible.

In the year since the fire that blackened nearly 8,800 acres and took out 18 homes, 12 neighborhoods have joined and five others likely will soon join to almost double the ranks of Fire Safe Council affiliates.

Four of those new chapters are in Carson City areas such as Mexican Dam, Kings Canyon, Lakeview and Timberline. Residents in the Clear Creek area had already formed a fire safe council chapter, and Timberline residents began discussing the need for one just days before the blaze.

"I sat in (Timberline residents Karen and Allen Christianson's) living room about a week before the Waterfall fire and discussed their vulnerability," said NFSC Executive Director Elwood Miller.

Another new council chapter is Eagle Ridge at Genoa, a place that doesn't even exist yet.

Developer Greg Painter began talking to the fire safe council before last summer's fire about his planned 55-home, 275-acre development. The first thing he built for the subdivision was a fire break.

The development is in the hills alongside Jacks Valley Road, west of Genoa Lakes Golf Course and adjacent to 720 acres of scenic, yet possibly combustible, open space.

Painter's idea is to ultimately have an entire fire-safe subdivision. He was already thinking about it before last summer's blaze but, he said, "certainly it made me that much more aware and I think it has the buyers, too."

Not only will contractors who will build the homes that eventually fill the land be

encouraged to incorporate fire-safe techniques into the houses and yards, but everyone who buys a home there will automatically be a member of the fire safe council.

In the rules to govern the future neighborhood's homeowners association, Painter has mandated every resident be a member and that the association pay their yearly membership dues.

Nevada Fire Safe Council spokesperson Candace Lowery said, "we would hope that all developers would follow suit."

The residents won't necessarily have to be active members, Lowery said, but at least they'll be getting all the organization's educational material and have access to expert advice. The Fire Safe Council also distributes grant money to its chapters for larger projects.

Painter said he believes a fire-conscious development will be an added selling point to home buyers and he thinks fire-safe design should be incorporated into every new development, maybe even by state or local law.

"When a new project comes in, you have an opportunity to hit everyone at once as they come in instead of doing it piecemeal," Painter said.

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