

A dozen steps towards a Firewise home

By Barbara Lemos



As a Firewise USA Community, St. James is working to mitigate the risks of property damage from regional wildfires. Educational outreach is a major element of the Firewise program. Firewise Committee members were pleased to meet with residents during the recent Severe Storm Fair.

Regardless of where you live in St. James, you can take several steps to better protect yourself and your property from fire danger. Here are a dozen practical ways to create and maintain “defensible space” around your home and prepare for fire emergencies.

1. Add emergency telephone numbers to your mobile phone directory. Always dial 911 in case of emergency. The Fire Department non-emergency is 910-253-9990; the St. James Emergency Operations Center, 910-253-4945; recorded message: 910-253-0949. Also, sign up for alerts.
2. Attach one or more garden hoses to functioning outdoor faucets — front and back — so they will be readily available if needed to wet down vegetation and exterior house surfaces.
3. Check window boxes, hanging planters and other “attachments” and remove highly flammable material such as coconut fiber that could be ignited by embers.
4. Similarly, patrol your garage, porches and patio for flammable materials such as propane tanks, gasoline cans and aerosol sprays and move them away from possible ignition sources.
5. Consider replacing dead plants and shrubs with fire-resistant species listed in our St. James Design Guidelines (found at www.stjamespoanc.org under “Resources” then “Architectural Control Guidelines”).
6. Prune shrubs and plants near your house to create a buffer zone to reduce fire risk. This provides the added benefit of facilitating maintenance such as painting and power washing.
7. Check your roof and gutters for accumulated pine needles and remove them (or arrange for someone else to do it while you remain safe!).
8. If you’re worried about dead trees or overhanging tree limbs, have a tree service give you an assessment and estimate of costs to remove them. Prioritize by those trees/limbs posing the greatest risk to your home.
9. Measure and mark off a 30-foot perimeter around your house and porches. This is the minimum recommended defensible space in which to focus your protective efforts.
10. Within your 30-foot perimeter, remove pine straw mulch, and replace it with bark nugget mulch which burns at a much slower rate.
11. Routinely clear your defensible space of anything that is not “lean, clean and green” such as pine needles, leaves, sick or dead plants and branches.
12. Scan your homeowner’s insurance policy and save it as a PDF file. Email it to yourself or save it on a flash drive so you can access it remotely in case of emergency or evacuation.

Further Firewise outreach will be held at selected community events, and Firewise literature is available at our Town Hall. Information to guide you on your Firewise journey can also be found at www.firewise.org/usa.

Editor’s Note: Barbara Lemos is a member of the TOSJ Firewise Committee.

