

## Santa Cruz Sentinel.com

### Soquel Fire Safe Council aims to keep the town fire safe

By Alia Wilson

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SOQUEL -- Piles upon piles of dry brush and branches lined Pau Hana Drive Thursday as neighbors pulled together with Central Fire to tackle the arduous task of preparing for the fire season.

The year-old Soquel Fire Safe Council's goal for this week: clearing years of dried vegetation from around the Pau Hana homes as the anniversary of the Summit, Martin and Trabing fires approaches.

The fire prevention team is bringing Cal Fire's chipper program to homes surrounded by wildland for the first time in the Soquel area to help address large areas at high risk.

"Cal Fire does a lot of state wildland areas but this is the first area to be incorporated into the chipper program for the Soquel Fire Safe Council," Central Fire Inspector Mike DeMars said. "I love the fact that we are working together. We've been saying for years that we can't do it all ourselves. We haven't had a relationship with neighborhoods in the past so this is a great way to help us help them."

The founder of the council, Thadyne Borchert, says the chipper program is one of the first steps the council plans to take to help educate Soquel

area residents about fire safety.

"We are still in the process of becoming a nonprofit. Currently the Santa Clara Fire Safe Council is our fiscal sponsor," Borchert said. "In the meantime, homeowners are supportive in wanting to hire a conservation crew to come out and clear the brush to help fulfill the LE100."

Central Fire Protection District and Cal Fire created the LE100 inspection program in response to a new law requiring homeowners to maintain a 100 foot defensible space around their house in areas at high risk of fire.

Fire is a high priority this year. On Monday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued an executive order allowing Cal Fire to secure and deploy the additional resources and personnel necessary to protect homes statewide from wildfires.

"It's not a matter of if it's going to happen but when it's going to happen," DeMars said. "Considering how dry it is and how little water there is, it's a recipe for disaster."

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## Fire Prevention Tips

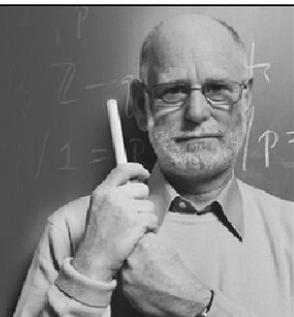
- Maintain 100 feet of defensible space around homes; keep horizontal and vertical space between plants.
- Make sure street name and address are clearly visible.
- Remove leaves, needles and dead branches from roof and gutter and keep limbs 10 feet from chimneys.
- Keep tree branches at least 6 feet above the ground.
- Landscape with fire-resistant plants; water regularly, remove dead growth.
- Stack wood at least 30 feet from all structures and keep vegetations 10 feet away.
- Clearly mark emergency water supply.

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