FIREWISE USA®

THE NEWLY RECOGNIZED COMMUNITY LEADER PLAYBOOK

A practical first-year guide to keeping your community organized, engaged, prepared, and ready to renew.

YOUR FIRST-YEAR PATH | ORGANIZE | ENGAGE | TRACK | RENEW

Santa Clara County FireSafe COUNCIL

FireSafe COUNCIL OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

WELCOME

Recognition is the beginning.

You and your steering committee put in the work to become Firewise USA® Recognized. Now the goal is to turn that achievement into a simple, sustainable community rhythm.

THE BIG IDEA

You do not need to do everything at once. Build a few repeatable systems for communication, engagement, education, data collection, and leadership - then improve them over time.

Your first-year roadmap

01	**Organize** Set a steering committee rhythm and use your Action Plan.
02	**Communicate** Create reliable resident and emergency communication.
03	**Engage** Give neighbors easy, social reasons to participate.
04	**Educate** Share useful information without overwhelming residents.
05	**Track** Collect investment, hours, and vegetation-removal data.
06	**Motivate** Celebrate visible progress and community wins.
07	**Renew** Prepare throughout the year instead of scrambling in fall.
08	**Sustain** Recruit future leaders and document your process.

SECTION 01

Organize Your Leadership

Build a routine that keeps the work moving without exhausting the same few people.

Set a meeting rhythm	Meet monthly, every other month, or quarterly. Use each meeting to set goals, assign owners, and review what was completed.
Use the 3-Year Action Plan	Treat the plan as your roadmap. Revisit it regularly and select realistic priorities for the current year.
Share responsibility	Divide communications, events, education, data collection, and renewal tasks among several people.

DO THIS NOW

Put the next three steering committee meetings on the calendar and choose one person to own each recurring responsibility.

SECTION 02

Communicate Clearly

Make it easy to reach residents before you need their attention.

Build your resident list	Maintain an up-to-date email distribution list for announcements, reminders, events, and Firewise information.
Agree on emergency communication	Consider a phone tree, group text, WhatsApp, MURS radios, sirens, or a calling service such as DialMyCalls.
Prepare messages in advance	Draft a few emergency message templates so leaders can communicate quickly when time matters.

COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

North Rodeo Gulch Firewise uses DialMyCalls to reach 300+ members quickly and keeps outgoing message templates ready for its board. Evaluate current pricing and whether a similar service fits your community.

SECTION 03

Engage Your Neighbors

Community participation is what turns recognition into a lasting Firewise culture.

Create reasons to join in	Try neighborhood workdays, seasonal cleanup challenges, educational events, preparedness walks, or informal gatherings.
Walk the neighborhood	In-person conversations build trust. Introduce yourself, learn residents' concerns, and invite them into manageable activities.
Mentor nearby communities	As your group gains experience, help adjacent neighborhoods understand how to start their own Firewise journey.

LEADER TIP - Roberts-Ridge Roads Firewise

Walk your neighborhood and get to know neighbors in person. Then walk adjacent neighborhoods and encourage them to form new Firewise communities. Experienced leaders can become valuable mentors.

SECTION 04

Educate Without Overwhelming

A steady stream of useful information works better than flooding residents with resources.

Share seasonal information	Promote local events, county programs, webinars, useful articles, and timely wildfire-preparedness topics.
Plan an educational activity	Firewise renewal includes an education component. Host or share a workshop, speaker, webinar, demonstration, or joint event with another community.
Try a quarterly newsletter	Keep it short: one seasonal topic, one upcoming action, one community win, and one reminder to report mitigation work.

A SIMPLE NEWSLETTER FORMULA

1 seasonal safety topic + 1 upcoming activity + 1 resident success + 1 data-reporting reminder.

SECTION 05

Track the Work All Year

Good data collection makes annual renewal dramatically easier.

Choose your reporting cycle	You may collect data by calendar year or use a consistent 12-month cycle tied to recognition. Pick a method, document it, and use it consistently.
Collect what matters	Track wildfire risk-reduction investment such as resident hours, dollars spent, and estimated vegetation removed.
Make reporting easy	Use a simple online form residents can submit throughout the year. Build the habit early instead of reconstructing months of activity later.

SMART PRACTICE

Keep one shared renewal folder for resident reports, educational activities, meeting notes, newsletters, photos, and supporting documentation.

SECTION 06

Make Progress Visible

People are more likely to participate when they can see that their neighbors are taking action too.

Celebrate accomplishments	With permission, recognize residents who complete major vegetation-removal or home-hardening projects.
Share year-to-date totals	Include simple progress numbers in newsletters or meetings: volunteer hours, green-waste volume, households participating, or projects completed.
Use positive peer momentum	Focus on what the community is accomplishing rather than only on what still needs to be done.

LEADER TIP - Upper Overlook Road Firewise

Count green-waste cans used to remove combustible material, track totals monthly and annually, and share the year-to-date amount in the quarterly newsletter. Give shout-outs for major cleanup efforts to help motivate others.

SECTION 07

Stay Renewal Ready

Treat renewal as a year-round process, not a November project.

Know the timing	Your first renewal is generally due in November of the year after recognition. Confirm the current deadline and requirements each year.
Check progress mid-year	Review your Action Plan, education activity, community investment, and resident reporting while there is still time to address gaps.
Keep records together	Store documentation as it happens so renewal becomes a review-and-submit process rather than a scavenger hunt.

MID-YEAR CHECK

By summer, can you identify your education activity, current investment totals, progress on the Action Plan, and where your supporting records are stored?

SECTION 08

Build Leadership That Lasts

Plan for turnover before your most active volunteers burn out.

Recruit early	Invite new residents into leadership before you have an urgent vacancy.
Offer small roles	Newsletter editor, event helper, block captain, photographer, data coordinator, and education lead are all useful entry points.
Document recurring tasks	Write down the basic process for renewal, newsletters, resident reporting, meetings, and events so knowledge survives leadership changes.

OPTIONAL BUT USEFUL

A simple community website can become a central hub for educational information, evacuation resources, meeting updates, your Firewise USA® certificate, and reporting links. Keep it current and manageable.

FIRST-YEAR TOOL

Leader Checklist

Use this page as your quick operating checklist. Check items off as your community builds its annual rhythm.

- ■ Schedule recurring steering committee meetings.
- ■ Review the Three-Year Action Plan and choose this year's priorities.
- ■ Create or update the resident email distribution list.
- ■ Agree on an emergency communication method.
- ■ Plan at least one educational activity.
- ■ Choose a resident data-collection method and reporting cycle.
- ■ Create one shared renewal/document folder.
- ■ Send a seasonal or quarterly community update.
- ■ Recognize resident accomplishments and visible progress.
- ■ Complete a mid-year renewal-readiness check.
- ■ Recruit additional volunteers or future steering committee members.
- ■ Confirm current Firewise USA® renewal requirements and deadline.

KEEP THIS IN MIND

Firewise USA® requirements, forms, deadlines, and program guidance can change. Verify current requirements with the official program and your local Fire Safe Council before submitting an annual renewal.