**Before Disaster Strikes!**

By Jessica Bennett

We all know that disasters are inevitable, ranging from the seemingly endless months of rain we usually get to the heat wave we experienced throughout the summer. Yet, how many of us are still unprepared for what could come? This guide can help you prepare so you can help yourself and others in the event of a crisis. In light of our recent close call, this first edition will be preparing for wildfire. It’s a little late, but since fire season is still in effect, we are still at risk. We have seen first-hand how quickly a fire can grow and, given the right conditions, how devastating it can be. So, what can you do to prepare?

In wildfires, firefighters triage homes so we know which ones we can have a chance at saving and which ones are too dangerous to dedicate precious resources to. Unfortunately there are never enough people to protect every home and this can result in the loss of someone’s sanctuary. We look at what is surrounding the house, accessibility to the house, what it’s made of, and how much time we have. And then we decide if the house can defend itself, if it can be defended with a little help, or if it is indefensible. You can make our job easier and help defend your home by doing a few simple things.

First: create at least 30 feet of defensible space around your home. This means clearing out vegetation from around the house and under decks, keeping the grass short, keep debris and clutter out of the yard, and trim trees back and up so they don’t overhang or provide an easy way for fire to spread. If you have trees on your property, keeping the underbrush down or if you have a field, keeping the grass cut short can mean the difference between saving homes and losing them. Second: make sure we can get to and from your house and turn around easily. Make sure the driveway is wide and either paved or flat dirt/gravel with no pot holes. Clear all overhangs away from the driveway and have a wide space to turn around. Third: assess what your home is made of. Wood siding and shake roofs are beautiful, but dangerous in fire situations. You need to periodically treat wood on your home to keep them fire resistant. Keep moss off of the roof and the gutters clean. Make sure there are screens over the openings to eaves, crawl spaces, and vent openings. Keep propane tanks, fuel tanks, and other hazardous materials away from the house when possible. Disposing of hazardous materials in the proper way when you no longer need them keeps them from accumulating on your property.

Maintaining your property and helping your neighbors keep their property clear can save many homes in our community. This guide by no means covers everything, but it definitely covers the first steps to creating a safer home. Safer homes mean safer citizens and a happier community. For further information, you can contact the fire department or visit our website at [www.cascadelocksfire.com](http://www.cascadelocksfire.com).

