

F E B R U A R Y

FIREWISE Newsletter

MAKING SENSIBLE CHOICES IN THE INTERFACE

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MEASURING A LOCAL PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAM THROUGH LOSS

In the spring of 2006 in Southwest Florida incendiary fires were ignited within dry and dense palmetto and gall berry under pine trees in the community of Lehigh Acres. Strong and very variable winds ranging from 20 to 30 mph combined with low relative humidity allowed spreading flames to consume 1,875 acres destroy 16 homes and threaten another 500 to 1,000 homes. Mr. Gerry J. LaCavera, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist, Florida Division of Forestry states, "Many of the homes saved from damage was only due to the mere shifting of winds, as other homes concealed by heavy brush and trees were totally consumed."

The fire in Lehigh Acres, located in Lee County, Florida, burned over a four-day period from April 30th to May 3rd. The sixteen homes destroyed were all permanent single-family homes of wood frame construction with most having asphalt shingled roofs and two with tile roofs. Nearly half had non-combustible stucco wall veneer with the other half having combustible siding. All the homes were occupied before the fire began, but evacuated when the Emergency Management Director issued mandatory evacuation orders. The fires were actually three separate ignition starts merged into a large, single fire spreading easily through available fuels. Nearly 90% of all the homes destroyed burned from the roof down, mainly due to vegetation too close to the homes or debris on the roof that ignited. There were no civilian casualties.

The area of Lehigh Acres is defined as high-risk with a significant and recent fire history. LaCavera said, "since 1999 our agency has worked to inform residents of this fire risk, what they can do about it and educating them about Firewise principles." He further stated "(We have) distributed the publication 'How to Have a Firewise Home' in addition to the use of print and television media, making a real effort to educate the residents." LaCavera goes on to say, "Despite these previous efforts and an increase of media coverage weeks leading up to the fire, we asked ourselves why our message didn't sink in with homeowners."

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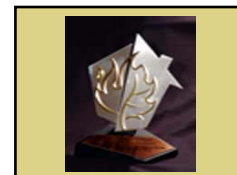
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Firewise Summit a
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Celebrates Recognition

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HOME IGNITION ZONE TRAINING WORKSHOPS OFFERED

The National Wildland/Urban Interface Program is offering a new two-day training workshop on **Assessing Wildland Hazards in the Home Ignition Zone** at various locations around the country. The first will be held in Portland, Oregon on May 15-16, 2007 at the Doubletree Hotel Lloyd Center.

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newsletter@nfpa.org

WASHINGTON STATE FIREWISE SUMMIT A SUCCESS

On January 12, 2007, a group of about 40 people, including homeowners, elected officials, and local, state and regional representatives of several fire agencies held a Firewise Summit in Mount Vernon, Washington. Nearly 30 of the participants either represented recognized Firewise Communities/USA sites or soon-to-be recognized communities. Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fire staff, volunteer fire departments, county fire departments, Resource Conservation & Development staff and county Emergency Medical Services agencies rounded out the participant list.

The purpose of the summit was to gather home and property owners, specifically Firewise Communities/USA participants, and representatives of several fire agencies in order to share successes and explore challenges they have experienced in their efforts to keep their communities safe from wildfire. During one part of the day, the group was divided into task groups and discussed concerns and problem-solving opportunities. The task groups rejoined for lunch, featuring a presentation by Judith Leraas Cook, Firewise Communities/USA program manager, about the recognition program. Leraas Cook also recognized Marc Titus of the DNR who had recently received a Firewise Leadership Award for his many efforts on behalf of Firewise Communities/USA.

During the afternoon session, all participated in a panel discussion moderated by Titus. He invited each of the morning's task groups to share their discussions and followed that with an open forum and a question and answer session. Leraas Cook stated, "The panel of experts responded to many, many questions. The group was then treated to a short talk delivered by Skagit County Commissioner Don Munks. The Commissioner offered his political support to community leaders in their wildfire mitigation efforts."

The Firewise Summit provided a great opportunity for state and local officials

to hear about community successes. According to Leraas Cook, "The best thing about the day was that everyone present had the chance to listen to the others' concerns and allow themselves an opportunity to share their viewpoints."



IMPROVED ACCESS IS GOAL FOR CRYSTAL LAKE CLUB, WISCONSIN

Members of Crystal Lake Club, a lakeside homeowners association in southeastern Wisconsin, understand what it takes to live in and enjoy their environment in a wild-fire-prone area. For the past 70 years, they have been implementing and practicing positive land stewardship and protecting the quality of their forests, open areas, lake, habitat, and infrastructure.

The Crystal Lake Fire of 2003 that struck nearby was a wake up call for most members of the Crystal Lake Club. During that fire, homes and property were saved due only to favorable winds. Later that year, residents became interested in the national recognition program called Firewise Communities/USA. The program, coordinated through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry, assisted the community by assessing their wildfire hazards and suggesting ways of lowering their risk. They also learned that it was up to community members to work together and mitigate those risks. Crystal Lake Club learned the lessons well and achieved recognition the following year and continues to this date to improve upon their past success.

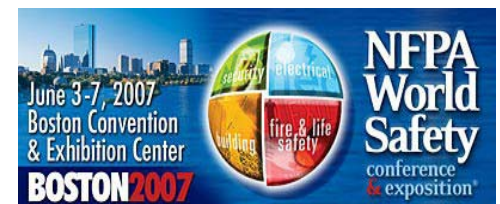
Their latest efforts are focused on improving the fire department's access to the community. Members consulted and worked with the Neshkoro Fire Department to identify ways to improve access to homes and property. The largest of the department's tanker trucks could not navigate the Lake road nor reach many of the homes in the area due to overgrowth and narrow roadways.

Using a Wisconsin DNR hazard mitigation grant, Crystal Lake Club obtained funding to remove trees along the roadway and driveways, and to trim up limbs so larger emergency vehicles had access to all individual properties. Club members logged over 100 hours marking trees and branches at some 70 properties, then used a private tree service to perform the actual work. Not only had it solved the access issue, but also reduced risk and fuels near homes and in some cases increased the defensible space in the home ignition zone.

As part of the latest Firewise effort, Crystal Lake Club continues to be a recognized Firewise Communities/USA community and residents benefit from easier and unobstructed access to all dwellings for fire and emergency vehicles. For more information, please contact Jolene Ackerman at (608) 267-7677 or by email at jolene.ackerman@wisconsin.gov.



NFPA WORLD SAFETY CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION



The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) World Safety Conference & Exposition will be held in Boston, Massachusetts on June 3-7, 2007. The conference features over 150 education sessions, dozens of case studies, changes and code update sessions, as well as an exposition with 250 exhibitors in the new Boston Convention & Exhibition Center. In addition, several one and two-day pre-conference seminars will be offered, as well as a keynote address by the historian and best-selling author David McCullough. For detailed information about the conference and to register please visit the web site

www.nfpa.org/wsce.



WOODLAND ESTATES, FLORIDA CELEBRATES RECOGNITION



In less than a year residents and land-owners of Woodland Estates in Sarasota County, Florida organized and identified risks to make great strides culminating in becoming a Firewise Communities/USA community. A local celebration in January 2007 honored the community and those who worked to achieve recognition.

Woodland Estates is a private estate community located in Southern Sarasota County. It is a small community consisting of 34 properties, each of five to ten acres, with 23 existing homes and 63 residents. Woodland Estates is a classic wildland/urban interface community whose resident's value and desired an authentic Florida wildland aspect of the neighborhood.

A hazard and wildfire risk assessment completed for Woodland Estates in early 2006 identified it as "Very High Hazard." Some of the items noted were limited access to the development, as only a single ingress and egress road via a bridge across a canal existed. Three dead-end roads having less than 50 feet turn-around space leading up to homes and no municipal water supply or hydrants. Natural vegetation including many highly combustible trees, shrubs and grasses were readily available. Lastly, many of the homes lacked little if any defensible space due to heavy growth, further complicated by the fact many of the plantings are

protected Florida flora.

A meeting to discuss a nearby-prescribed burn for the area identified several interested and motivated community residents. It was learned that a prescribed burn five years earlier had gotten out of control and threatened Woodland Estates. Although none of the properties were affected, the fire did require the evacuation of residents some not able to make it out in time.

Several residents subsequently attended a Firewise Community workshop sponsored by Sarasota County in June 2006. As a result, a Firewise Committee of 12 Woodland Estates resident was formed and worked under the guidance and direction of DOF staff. Within a month, a highly successful Firewise Presentation event was held for the community with 21 residents attending.



In October of that same year, DOF area supervisors performed neighborhood risk assessments with most of the property owners participating. The overall goal was to significantly decrease the fire hazard risk to the community with secondary benefit of the Firewise Committee working to develop a sense of community among Woodland Estates neighbors.



The Committees action plan first implemented mechanical fuel mitigation in November/December 2006 with assistance from the DOF. This included adding or restoring firebreaks to allow fire and emergency personnel access to power lines and

to areas where a fire or other emergency may occur placing residents at risk. In addition, 30-foot defensible spaces were created around all structures with removal of thick heavy brush. Non-combustible addresses were placed on all properties and driveway clearance improved to allow



access for larger vehicles. A dry hydrant was installed near a creek and the community actively pursued an alternate "emergency" exit strategy near property owned by the County of Sarasota.

The Firewise Committee continues to keep all residents educated and informed by passing out literature and holding regular meetings. The Committee feels that the recognition of Woodland Estates as a Firewise Community/USA, will serve as a stimulus for others to become more involved.

"This experience has been an uplifting example of how city, county, state and federal officials can successfully interact with each other and private citizens achieve good feelings and improved safety in their community," said Patrick Mahoney, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist for the Florida Department of Forestry. "Woodland Estates is extremely appreciative for all the help and reassurance received from all."



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MEASURING A LOCAL PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAM THROUGH LOSS



Deciding to find out himself, LaCavera formed a Lehigh Acres Focus Group open to anyone affected by the fire. The turnout was better than he expected, including seven people from the 16 homes destroyed by the fire that all provided interesting feedback. LaCavera stated, "the group was very verbal and initially hard to keep on track, but several comments were constructive and interesting."

Four members of the group thought that high winds were the sole reason homes were lost during the fire. All stated they had watched television and read the local paper regularly, but all initially indicated they had never heard of Firewise or that the fire danger was so high. Further questioning about the Division's efforts to make people aware of Firewise and the danger, caused some residents to agree they had heard of Firewise but didn't think it applied to them. LaCavera said, "Two people actually remembered receiving the 'How to Have a Firewise Home' but had never taken it out of the mailing wrapper."

The group proposed several ideas to improve targeted fire safety messages. "Interestingly all but one (person) were already in the communications plan of the Lehigh Acres Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)," said LaCavera. One suggestion that stood out was using church and faith groups as a way to reach residents better. Another suggested increasing the use of bilingual material in reaching all members of the community. LaCavera stated, "The best recommendation by the group was the use of themselves - those who actually lost their homes - to use their stories as part of a media campaign. In fact, all agreed to pose for a possible poster and use their individual experiences from before and after the fire."

The group's input provided important feedback about the local media campaign that mirrors many efforts nationwide. It proved that despite a concentration of media coverage and providing information directly to the homeowner, messages do not always gather interest or support. In fact, the focus group could not answer the question of why the message didn't sink in. In Lehigh Acres, LaCavera hopes that sharing the stories of these people's losses may motivate others to action. LaCavera concluded, "The significant high risk continues with landscaping and building construction still a problem. The area has a history of significant fires annually that the Division of Forestry recognizes; however the homeowners still do not."



ALASKA FIREWISE PROGRAM RECEIVES AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

In June 2006, the Alaskan community of Horseshoe Lake, located in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, became the first community in Alaska to achieve Firewise Communities/USA status. The award was received on the tenth anniversary of a catastrophic wildfire that consumed over 400 structures in the area before it was controlled. Now, Horseshoe Lake and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Firewise program have received another kind of recognition.

The Alaska Municipal League and Alaska Conference of Mayors' 2006 Community Award of Excellence in Education and Local Government was awarded in recognition of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Wildfire Mitigation Education Program and its success in becoming the first Firewise Communities/USA site in the State of Alaska.

The Alaska Municipal League honors small, medium and large cities or boroughs with the Alaska Community Awards of Excellence, which identifies and publicly recognizes exemplary efforts or innovations in local governments. The winning communities are featured in an article in the League's monthly magazine, *The Touchstone*. In addition they receive commendation from the National League of Cities, and are honored at the 2006 Alaska Municipal League Local Government Conference in Juneau, Alaska.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Wildfire Mitigation Education Program is managed through the Department of Emergency Services and is coordinated by Beatrice Adler and her team, consisting of Michieal Salmon and Nancy Taylor.

Cathi Kramer, a resident of Horseshoe Lake, is the driving force who organized her neighbors, led community clean-up days, and assisted each resident of Horseshoe

Lake in learning how to make their home safer from the threat of wildfire. The 1996 Miller's Reach Fire destroyed several homes around Horseshoe Lake including the Kramer residence.

If you would like to read more about Horseshoe Lake in Alaska or the more than 200 other communities who have received Firewise Communities/USA recognition, please visit "Community Stories" at www.firewise.org/usa/index.htm.



FIREWISE LEADERSHIP AWARD NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

The Firewise Leadership Awards program is designed to recognize individuals and organizations who demonstrate exemplary work in furthering the vision and mission of the national Firewise Communities program at the local, state, and regional levels.

The awards are sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team, a consortium of wildland fire agencies that includes the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Emergency Management Association, the US Fire Administration, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and state forestry organizations.

Open to any individuals and organizations conducting relevant activity in the wildland/urban interface and established criteria, the Firewise Leadership Awards must relate to wildland fire mitigation activities in residential developments. Eligible Firewise efforts may include, but are not limited to:

- Program communications, advertising, exhibits and/or other informational initiatives
- Success in involving communities
- Collaboration across agency and/or tribal jurisdictions

- Innovations in engineering
- Special partnerships

Complete criteria and submission guidelines can be found at the website [Firewise Leadership Award](http://FirewiseLeadershipAward.com). On the website you'll also find our 2006 winners and read about their successes. Deadline for submitting a nomination is June 30, 2007. www.firewise.org/award.



LOOKING FOR YOUR FIREWISE "SAVE" STORIES

When a range fire ran through 25,000 acres of grassland in Waikoloa, Hawaii in August 2005, it jumped firebreak after firebreak until it reached the last one bordering Waikoloa village. Cleared by hand weeks in advance by Waikoloa residents in a Firewise program, the last firebreak held. "Firewise works," said Pete Hoffmann, chairman of the Waikoloa Firewise Committee and a member of the Hawaii County Council. Evidence from other places in the U.S. supports Mr. Hoffman's assertion. Jan Fulkerson of the Texas Forest Service stated, "One of our (Firewise) communities had a nearby brush fire with flame heights nearly six to eight feet in height and quickly approaching homes. Firewise efforts by nearby homeowners to mow grass some 50 feet out from their properties before the fire saved their homes."

These are just two of the many documented Firewise "Saves" that the national Firewise program collects from all over the country. Residents who have knowledge of Firewise activities in their communities are best at sharing these types of stories. We invite anyone with a personal story to share about how Firewise is working to save homes and property to contact us. We'll share it with others around the country and use the information to help our program improve.

If you have a Firewise "Save" story you would like to share, please email us at newsletter@firewise.org. Please include identifying information along with your story and we will include it in the Firewise Newsletter and also in the Firewise Article Archive along with the other documented Firewise "Saves"!



IDAHO TOUR BRINGS AWARENESS TO FUELS REDUC- TION PROJECTS

On October 3, 2006, Bannock County residents and other interested parties jumped into vans at Pocatello's Fire Station #5 and took a tour of six local projects to see firsthand what Three Rivers RC&D has been able to accomplish with its fuels reduction projects to create "Firewise" communities. Approximately 32 people attended, including Bannock County Commissioners, numerous local Fire Departments personnel, Congressional aides to Congressman Mike Simpson (ID-2), representatives of the Three Rivers RC&D Council, and personnel from the BLM Idaho Falls District and the



Three Rivers RC&D Fire Education Team Leader described a defensible space project around a home in the Buckskin area.

Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

The purpose of the tour was to show current wildland fire problems in Bannock County and to update tour participants about what is being done to mitigate risks in the area through fuels reduction, development and enforcement of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) codes, and public education. It also provided an excellent forum to share information about funding opportunities for these projects and programs that are available to homeowners residing in the Wildland Urban Interface.

"A large part of the problem with individuals moving into the Wildland Urban

Interface is that they don't know what programs and support are out there to help them reduce the dangerous fuels around their homes," said Kevin Conran, Idaho Falls District Mitigation Specialist. "We hope this tour will provide the resources and materials they need to create changes in their own communities." For the past six years, Three Rivers RC&D along with the Gateway Interagency Fire Front (GIFF) - a consortium of agencies that includes local emergency services, fire departments, Forest Service and BLM staffs - have combined to reduce the risk of wildfire in the WUI on both public and private lands in Bannock County. With several grants from federal agencies, the RC&D has been able to implement critical fuels reduction projects, which will reduce the intensity of wildfire in areas near homes.

At each of the stops on the tour, participants discussed and defined the fire issues. They also identified and discussed mitigation projects to reduce the risks to communities. One stop on the tour allowed participants to view several projects from Center Street, where they also saw four scars on the landscape where fires previously threatened homes in the WUI. These visible scars gave participants a dramatic sense of how dangerous fires can be in Idaho's arid climate. Projects are strategically connected to each other to create a consistent and effective fuel break between WUI areas.

For example the Buckskin II Project includes private lands adjacent to the BLM's Camelback Project. With the help of 21 property owners, various fuel break openings will be completed to tie into the existing Camelback fuel break. Fuels specialists hope to have Buckskin II completed by October 2007. "The Pocatello area has been a leader in homeowner education and interagency cooperation in Idaho for years and the fire community over there is making a big difference in the way people build and live in the wildland urban areas that are at risk from wildfire," said Jon Skinner, State Fire Mitigation Specialist.

The Johnny Creek Firewise Community, tour stop number six, represents an amazing effort by homeowners to improve their defensible space. "In this community alone, 167 homeowners and volunteers have put in over 2,000 hours making their community safer from wildfire by removing

hazardous fuels around their homes and neighborhood," said Gretl Class, RC&D Fire Education Team Leader. Although much is being done, there still exists a significant need for public help. Many homes are still at risk in the WUI.

Money and time are always issues for completing projects. Funding for these projects is provided from a number of grant sources primarily funded by the BLM Communities at Risk Program and through the Idaho Department of Lands Program. Working on these projects is time intensive and has required numerous resources. Over 3,500 volunteer hours have been contributed to making these projects a success. About 1,260 cubic yards of un-chipped material, 117 tons of chipped material, and



Chubbuck Fire Department Chief Eric King describes development plans and their impacts on the fire service.

25 tons of un-chipped woody material was removed. In addition to the mechanical treatments, over 120 acres were treated with prescribed fire for resource protection and benefit.

The Three Rivers RC&D Bannock County Fuels Reduction Project Tour stressed that funding from grants is available to homeowners to help them improve their landscape. Many projects include a cost share aspect to reduce the out-of pocket expenses that landowners may incur, reimbursing them up to 50%. Furthermore, if a homeowner can convince a neighbor to participate, they can increase their reimbursement rate to 60%, and if they can convince two neighbors, it goes up to 70%. At the end of the tour, the group convened at Pocatello Fire Station #5 for a barbecue and short meeting to address any questions individuals might have.

Source: [BLM Snapshots December 15, 2006](#)



WEATHER CHANNEL HIGHLIGHTS AUSTIN, TEXAS WILDFIRE RISK

What would your family do if a wildfire were threatening your home? Are you prepared? The Weather Channel series "It Could Happen Tomorrow," asked those questions and showed how emergency officials and homeowners are preparing for wildfires in the Austin, Texas area.

"Prevention is our best offense, but being prepared is our greatest defense," said Jan Fulkerson, urban wildland interface specialist with Texas Forest Service. "Wildfires burned through communities such as Cross Plains, Carbon and Ringgold last year and were devastating. We want to make sure Texans are informed of the necessary steps to prepare for wildfires, long before a fire is looming. Proactive homeowners are the key to preventing loss of lives and property."

In 2006, wildfires in Texas took 21 lives, destroyed 734 homes and burned more than 2.26 million acres. The Austin area is at risk for wildfires because of the vegetation type, which is primarily junipers that are quick to burn, and the hilly terrain.

"It Could Happen Tomorrow: The Austin Fires" aired in January and again in early February and presented what may occur if a large wildfire erupted in West Travis County. It depicted what the spread of the fire could be and the challenges to evacuations and emergency response. It also showed what some homeowners have done to improve the odds that their home would survive a wildfire.

"It's often the simple steps that make a difference, like replacing vegetation around wooden decks with pea gravel, keeping grass mowed and screening in attic vents," Fulkerson said. "Also, by removing vegetation like junipers from at least 30 feet around your home, you greatly increase your home's chance of surviving a wildfire."

To find out more about the wildfire risk in the Austin, Texas area please visit the Texas Forest Service website <http://texasforestservice.tamu.edu> or contact Traci Weaver (817)579-1847 for more information.



THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL WILDLAND FIRE CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN SPAIN

The protection of the world's environment cannot be effective without national and international fire management policies for natural, semi-natural and cultural landscapes and ecosystems that constitute an essential part of the habitable land and the functioning of the global system. National and international policies must be designed to meet both the specific local and the common global threats from wildfires and excessive application of fire in land-use change. These policies must be developed cooperatively with all the stakeholders involved in the protection of the environment and humanity.

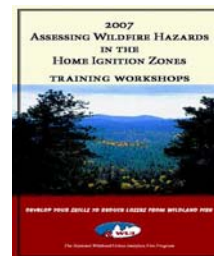
A series of International Wildland Fire Conferences was initiated in the late 1980s aimed at bringing together both the technical members of the fire community and the authorities concerned with policy and national practices in wildland fire management to realize their common interests of wildland fire risk management and disaster reduction at local, national, regional and global scales. During the International Wildland Fire Summit, held in Sydney, Australia, on October 8, 2003, the invitation presented by the representatives of Spain to organize and host the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference in 2007, was accepted. The conference will be held from May 13th -17th, 2007 in Seville, Spain.

Online registration for the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference is available from the conference website, www.wildfire07.es in the section "Online Registration Form". Questions regarding the conference should be addressed to the press office at press@wildfire07.es.



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HOME IGNITION ZONE TRAINING WORKSHOPS



The workshops will cover the myths of wildland/urban interface (W/UI) fire, the history and context of W/UI fire disasters, sequential elements of a W/UI fire disaster, research and case studies, risk factors in the home ignition zone, information needed to conduct an assessment, the general health of the ecosystem, inspecting the home ignition zone, accessibility in case of a wildfire emergency, documenting an assessment, and much more. The workshops will feature question & answer sessions, class discussions, and classroom exercises in which participants will perform home ignition zone evaluations, practicing the information they have learned.

The course is designed for a diverse audience, including state and urban Foresters; staff of federal, state, county or local agencies; Firewise State Liaisons; developers and builders; landscape designers and architects; community planners; and insurance professionals.

The International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET), an authorized provider of continuing education and training programs, has approved the workshop for 1.6 (one point six) Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to all who participate.



The cost of the workshop is \$200.00 per person and includes class materials, continental breakfast, lunch, and breaks. Hotel group rates apply and vary depending on location. Use the registration form at the back (next page) of this newsletter to register and mail it with payment to: Firewise, Attn. HIZ Workshop, One Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169.



