



NEWS RELEASE

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY & MAST SEND FIRE SAFETY AWARENESS CALENDAR TO ALL MOUNTAIN PROPERTY OWNERS

***Information-packed calendar provides fire-safety tips and emphasizes the need for
thinning the forest to combat the bark beetle infestation and remove green fuel***

SAN BERNARDINO — Property owners in the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains are getting a 2007 calendar in their mailboxes this week, courtesy of San Bernardino County and the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST).

The calendar is a key component of the County's two-year program designed to urge property owners in the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains to thin the trees and vegetation on their property to help make the forest more fire-resistant. The public outreach program was launched in November.

Emblazoned with the slogan "A thinner forest is a healthier forest, and a healthier forest is a fire-resistant forest," the information-rich calendar features valuable fire-safety tips for property owners.

"This calendar is the best way to reach every property owner and convey to them critical fire-prevention information and advice," said San Bernardino County Fire Chief Pat Dennen. "With its vivid, mountain-themed photographs, it's a calendar anyone would be proud to display. And because roughly 60 percent of the property owners don't actually live in the mountains year-round, this is a cost-effective tool for placing critical fire-prevention information and regulations at their fingertips."

Each month features fire-safety tips appropriate for the season, including tree and brush thinning, disaster preparedness, creating a defensible space, appropriate landscaping and fire prevention. Contact information for local, state and federal fire-protection agencies is also included.

The calendar reinforces MAST's message that the emphasis of fire-prevention measures is shifting from the removal of dead and dying trees to removing certain live trees and vegetation. Green fuel removal is necessary to gain an upper hand on the bark beetle infestation and reduce the risk of devastating wild fires like the Grand Prix and Old fires in 2003. "The forest needs to be restored to

a sustainable number of healthy vigorous trees and brush,” CDF Fire Chief Tom O’Keefe said. “Appropriate thinning of trees and brush may be needed to achieve a healthier more fire safe forest.” It’s also the law. The state legislature revised Public Resource Code 4291 in 2005, mandating that property owners in mountainous areas, forest-covered lands or any land that is covered with flammable material create at minimum a 100-foot defensible space (or to the property line) around their homes and other structures. This does not mean the property must be clear-cut to bare soil. It primarily involves thinning and breaking up the continuity of ladder fuels and large areas filled with contiguous shrubs that can readily transmit fire.

“The critical issue is that densely packed trees make it easier for the bark beetle infestation to spread and this creates a greater fire hazard.” explained Forest Supervisor, Jean Wade-Evans. “By thinning the live trees, it will help to create a healthy forest while simultaneously increasing resistance to fire spread. Everyone wins.”

County and state officials remind the public that property owners are responsible for making their property fire-safe. They point to public education programs and the success of the weed abatement program as evidence that property owners, once they understand the value of reducing the fire danger, will initiate fuel reduction activities around their homes well before any abatement notices come out.

While maintaining fire safety on private land has always been the responsibility of property owners, over the past three years, the County and other members of MAST have worked together to remove approximately 500,000 hazardous trees. Existing grant money for dead tree removal is expected to run out by December 2007. Any trees eligible for removal under existing grant money must be identified and marked by authorities no later than June 2007. For more information on the Hazardous Tree Removal Program, call 909-867-1240.

Property owners can get free advice from a licensed, professional forester in developing a forest thinning plan and many are eligible for up to 75 percent reimbursement for implementing their plan through the California Department of Forestry’s Forest Care program. For more information, call 1-888-883-THIN or visit www.sbnfa.org.

For additional information, property owners should contact their local fire protection agency.

ABOUT MOUNTAIN AREA SAFETY TASKFORCE

MAST is a coalition of local, state and federal government agencies, private companies and volunteer organizations in San Bernardino and Riverside counties that are concerned with public safety in the mountain areas of their respective jurisdictions. For more information about MAST, visit www.calmast.org.

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