

# HOAs join wildfire-prevention program

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Three HOAs are the first in Green Valley to participate in a program that organizers hope ignites more community conversations about wildfire prevention.

Firewise USA — an educational program sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service's National Fire Protection Association — provides homeowners with a framework for living with wildfires and encourages communities to take collective action to prevent them.

Locally, the program is being offered to Green Valley homeowners through the Greater Green Valley Community Emergency Response Team (GGV CERT).

"The whole success of the program is up to the HOAs themselves", said John McGee, vice president of CERT. "The Arizona Department of Forestry can come in and do an assessment and give them a report, but then it's pretty much up to them to take care of whatever needs to be done."

## HOW IT WORKS

The Department of Forestry and Fire Management performed wildfire risk assessments Feb. 7 at the request of the Canoa Vistas II, Townhouse VI and La Cañada Desert Homes I homeowners associations.

Risks include dead vegetation, debris, building materials, street dimensions,

## Learn more

**To request a Firewise USA presentation in your community, visit the Greater Green Valley CERT website at [ggvcert.com](http://ggvcert.com) and select the Firewise USA icon, or contact [greenvalleycert@gmail.com](mailto:greenvalleycert@gmail.com)**

emergency vehicle access, fire hydrant access, condition of street signs, local weather, topography and recent fire history.

"All of that gets fed into a score," said Aaron Casem of AZ Department of Forestry and Fire Management. "After the assessment, each community will have either a low, moderate, high or extreme fire rating."

After the HOAs receive a detailed wildfire risk assessment from the Department of Forestry, they are required to develop a community action plan.

The plan varies based on the needs of the community, but the program mainly focuses on removing flammable materials from around the house, and within a 100-foot radius called the "home ignition zone" that could ignite from embers.

At a minimum, each official Firewise USA Site is required to annually invest an hour of volunteer



John McGee Photo

Aaron Casem, left, and Pedro Mungarro of AZ Department of Forestry and Fire Management with Bonnie Myers and Dale Sonnenberg of La Cañada Desert Homes pose for a photo after Casem and Mungarro performed wildfire risk assessments of the neighborhood.

work per home per year in risk reduction activities, including coordinating outreach events, collaborating with experts or performing home maintenance.

A community's Action Plan must also be updated every three years, and a new risk assessment conducted every five years.

At least one insurance company, USAA, offers a homeowners insurance discount for Firewise USA sites.

Individual homeowners can also contact CERT to schedule a wildfire safety assessment.

"We have a detailed checklist that we go

through with the homeowner showing them what might present a risk to them," McGee said.

## WHY NOW?

In 2021, wildfires burned more than 7 million acres nationally, and much of the Western U.S. remains in moderate to severe drought categories, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

According to the National Weather Service, the 2021 monsoon season was the third wettest on record for the Green Valley area, significantly more than the previous year, which was the second-dri-

est on record with only 1.62 inches of rain. The rainfall from last season brought a lot of new vegetation that has dried out to create perfect ground fuel for wild-land fires.

Because of this, McGee says he hopes the Firewise program continues to catch on in Green Valley.

"There's 80 HOAs in Green Valley, we would like to get them all involved," he said.

Kevin McNichols, the volunteer coordinator for the Green Valley Fire District, has also been educating the community about the program, sometimes alongside McGee.

"Often we don't think of our home in the Arizona desert as a threat for wildfire, but when people teach them the little things they can do that can make a big impact to reduce the fire hazard, I think they'll be impressed with this program," he said.

Wildfire risk assessments for the three neighborhoods inspected on Feb. 7 aren't official yet, but Casem believes they are in relatively good shape.

"If the three communities that we evaluated choose to go forward, they're gonna have some really good first steps that are already done," he said.

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**Designate a LOCAL contact as your advocate.** Put this person at the top of your Emergency Contacts list after ensuring they are willing to do this. You want someone you trust who can be with you while you aren't feeling well to take notes on doctors orders, arrange additional

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