

Living With **WILDFIRE**

Macy Quintanilla

NATURAL BEAUTY SURROUNDS THOSE OF US WHO live in the Columbia River Gorge. While the natural landscape surrounding your home may be beautiful, hot, dry weather can create hazards of wildfire.

Oregon wildfires have sometimes destroyed entire communities. Bandon, a small coastal community, was leveled in 1914 and Astoria in 1922. The 1933 Tillamook Fire burned much of the dense timber of the Northern Coast Range. In 1936, the town of Bandon again burned. Estimates suggest only 16 out of 500 buildings survived.

Throughout the 1950's through 1980's people increasingly moved out of urban centers into suburban developments where wildfire and homes continued to clash.

People quickly realized the main problem—wooden built structures with too much surrounding vegetation fueled wildfires. In 1997 the Oregon Legislature passed the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act. The Act responded to the escalating problems as well as risks to firefighters and the rising cost of fire suppression. It identifies the homeowner's role in protecting their homes during wildfires and in preventing damage by making the area around the home safer for fire suppression personnel to work.

The Act applies to all Oregon counties, but has not been implemented statewide. In the fall of 2008, Wasco County Court and the Oregon Department of Forestry completed the initial classification of the wildland interface for Wasco County. Homes in the classification area received a Property Evaluation and Self-Certification Guide detailing the fuel-reduction standards and how to create the necessary fuel breaks around the home.

The guide contains valuable information for all homeowners living in areas of natural landscape. The full guide can be requested through the local Oregon Department of Forestry or found on their website, www.oregon.gov/ODF.

Simple steps to protect your home from fire damage:

- ✿ Establish a fuel break of 30 feet around the home and other structures.
- ✿ Establish a driveway fuel break, both vertical and horizontal.
- ✿ Remove dead vegetation overhanging your roof.
- ✿ Sparks from a chimney can fly! Clear a 10-foot perimeter around it.
- ✿ Keep gutters clear of needles, leaves and other debris.
- ✿ Clear flammable material from beneath decks and stairways.
- ✿ Store firewood at least 20 feet from all structures.
- ✿ Follow open burning restrictions.
- ✿ Make sure your address is visible for fire fighters.

CAULKING

Jim Beattie, Gorge Rentals

At the beginning of each year Gorge Rentals begins annual inspections of all of the properties managed for long term and vacation rentals. By far, the majority of the work orders I receive say "caulk, caulk, and re-caulk!"

Whether you're a home owner, a renter, a landlord, or a property investor, caulk is one of the least expensive and one of the easiest preventative maintenance projects you can tackle. Caulk is an easy fix. The next time you're in the shower, brushing your teeth, or doing the dishes take a look around. Check around the sink and along the backsplash, around the base of your toilet, and all around your tub and shower to determine if caulking needs to be replaced or repaired.

When you discover an area that needs attention, remove as much of the old caulk as possible. Make sure the area is clean and dry. Apply enough caulk to cover the area but not too much that it won't ever really dry. One critical element is cure and dry time. Allow at least 12 hours to 24 hours before exposing the new caulk to moisture.

Caulk comes in a variety of colors, but the most common are white or clear. Purchasing mildew resistant caulk for these areas is very important. My favorite is Polyseamseal. It is mildew resistant, water based so it cleans up easy, and it guns and spreads smoothly and easily. A couple of helpful tools are a wet sponge or clean wet rag. Once you apply the caulk to the area, try wetting your finger with warm water and lightly running it over the caulk. This should give you a nice, smooth finish.

Water damage from old and dried out caulk, or a lack of it, is expensive, time consuming and a mess. Caulk is cheap. You choose.