

March 12, 2020

SPREAD THE WORD – MAKING YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRESMART

This article is the third of four FireSmart installments over the winter to remind and educate residents of the ever present danger of wildfire in our community. We all share a responsibility to make our homes and communities safer, so this article will focus on the Community Assessment and National FireSmart Recognized Community approach.

Within our region we have great diversity in large and small communities, and a mix of urban and rural. The FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program (FCCRP) assists communities and individual home owners with reducing the risk of a wildfire turning into an urban disaster. Research has shown that it isn't only those communities that border a green space that need to be concerned with urban/wildfire interfaces. During major wildfire events, embers can get thrown for miles and land in the center of communities and neighbourhoods. The old notion that only those homes that back up against a forest are at risk of wildfire has been dispelled numerous times over with recent large fires. The goal of is to break the cycle of disaster by not allowing the fire to proceed beyond the barrier a FireSmart Community creates.

Becoming nationally recognized as a FireSmart Community is not as difficult or onerous as one might think. Being nationally recognized also doesn't mean that the risk of wildfire to a community is zero but it does recognize that residents are working on reducing risk and have an active plan to do so over a number of years.

"Many urban and rural communities within Canada have achieved this status. We are encouraging individual communities within the CSRD to consider the national recognition program and we are here to help," says Len Youden, CSRD FireSmart Coordinator.

For the purposes of looking at the Community Recognition Status, we think block party or neighbourhood BBQ sized community. Again, this can be large or small geographically but generally would we define a community as a group of residents that would naturally organize for a neighbourhood event.

So why would a neighbourhood pursue Nationally Recognized status and how do they go about doing it?

First, obtaining National FireSmart Recognition status sends a serious message that the residents and home owners in this area are actively reducing wildfire risk to protect their homes. Any new residents are more likely to adopt this approach.



NEWS RELEASE

Much of the wildfire behaviour research in Canada and the U.S. is being funded by insurance companies who have major exposure to losses from insured properties. While there is no current evidence in Canada to suggest your insurance rates will drop if you are nationally recognized, it certainly can't hurt. As the losses to wildfire increase, the insurance industry will respond with changes that may include prohibitively expensive insurance costs or the inability to get insurance at all if you live in a wildfire risk area.

"Why not get in front of this issue within your neighbourhood and reduce the wildfire risk in your community?" asks Youden. "Even if you do have great insurance coverage for your home, ask anyone who has ever been through a major loss claim and it's not likely an experience they would willingly like to repeat."

Visit the CSR D Website for more information on the process. If you have the desire and a couple of other residents to form a committee, we will help guide you through the process. Here is a basic overview:

- one resident becomes a Community Champion and organizes a committee
- the CSR D assigns a Local FireSmart Representative (LFR),
- a joint FireSmart Assessment of your neighbourhood is conducted,
- once hazards are identified, the committee works on a plan to reduce the risk with support from the LFR,
- this plan is reviewed and submitted to the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program for consideration,
- if accepted, your community becomes nationally recognized.

At this point, The CSR D has some funds from a grant to support communities that want to achieve national recognition status. The CSR D can help with a Local FireSmart Representative to work with you, cover some costs of equipment rentals such as wood chippers or bins, but we can't do the clean up work for you.

Why not get your neighbours together and start thinking about getting recognized?

Remember, it's our individual responsibility to make our homes and properties FireSmart. Contact us at 250.833.5910 to have one of our local professionals attend your next community meeting.

For further information please contact Tracy Hughes, CSR D Communications Coordinator at 250.833.5963 or toll free at 1.888.248.2773 or email Thughes@csrd.bc.ca.