

Fireproofing Your Home

BY MEREDITH DAY

Last November the terrible Sylmar fire destroyed more than 500 manufactured homes in California's Oakridge Mobile Home Park. At a news conference near the development, Governor Schwarzenegger said the devastation had convinced him that mobile homes should be required to include more fire-resistant materials.

The truth is, manufactured-home factories already offer construction elements to meet all fire code standards: fire-retardant concrete composite siding, tempered-glass windows, fire-retardant roof vents, and class-A fire-rated shingles. In addition, California currently requires that fire sprinklers be installed in all manufactured homes situated in high-fire-danger areas.

Other safety tips to keep in mind:

1 Gas lines are now required to have ground fault cutoffs in many areas. If your home is threatened, just go out and jiggle the gas meter. The gas will automatically shut off at the source.

2 Trees and flammable decor items should be kept at a distance from your home. Use concrete, nonflammable decor whenever possible. If your lot features tall pines or other evergreens, attach a large 360-degree sprinkler head to a galvanized (not plastic) pipe and run it up the trunk to just above the top of the tree. While you may seem like a nut to your neighbors, when a fire approaches you can turn the water on and protect the tree so flying embers don't find a foothold.

3 When installing a new home, it's not a bad idea to bring in a larger water line with a controllable pressure regulator. This way, you can adjust the pressure when the need is great to protect your home.

4 "Water curtain" misters under the eaves and sprinklers that cover the roof are invaluable. Install an easily accessible turn-on valve connected to a backup thermostat. This will automatically turn on the system if the temperature is abnormally high. Even a simple-to-install, powerful Rain Bird sprinkler placed on the center of the roof can be a home saver if you turn it on in time.



5 Smoke alarms should be placed throughout the house and on the outer walls as well. They can warn you of an approaching fire before smoke gets into the house. If the detector goes off when your neighbor barbecues, you may have to turn it off temporarily. But isn't that worth the additional first warning it can provide of a fast-moving fire?

6 When buying a manufactured home, analyze its components from a fire-safety point of view. Will that darling trellis become tinder for a fire? Are you planting succulents or shrubberies that harbor excess dried wood beneath the exterior shell of greenery?

7 Those wood chips look nice in the planters around your home, but could they become a flame magnet? Colored gravel is a great alternative in California for a high-fire-danger area. Not only does it conserve water, it is fireproof if kept clean of leaf debris.

8 If you live in a fire area, do not even consider wood siding. You can afford to upgrade to concrete composite to help save your home in a fire.

Author and architectural designer MEREDITH DAY has authored several books, including "How To Buy and Sell Mobile and Manufactured Homes." She lectures at colleges on "Efficient Innovation in Manufactured Housing."