



# FIRESAFE MONTANA

## FIRE SAFE COUNCIL HANDBOOK

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why Does Your Community Need A FireSafe Council?

Enticed by secluded settings and beautiful vistas, Montana's population has soared in the last 30 years. Suburbanization has pushed communities into the wildland-urban interface, blurring the boundaries between cities and nature.

When we choose to live among nature, we must learn to live with fire. Montana's wildland ecosystems are fire dependent; they need fire to survive. Fire thins the vegetation, giving plants room to grow. It cracks seed casings and replenishes the soil, allowing new life to thrive. Fire is a fact of life in Montana.

Learning to live with fire means protecting our community assets from potential wildfire damage. That's what a **FireSafe Council** can do:

**Mobilize** people in the community who stand to lose something of value to fire  
**Create** a powerful group initiative  
**Save** lives, property and money from wildfire

## **Local Councils In Action**

Local councils can make their communities safer, better places to live by:

- Developing an emergency preparedness plan for the community before a wildfire occurs. This proactive measure minimizes loss of life, property, homes, businesses, natural and historic areas, and other valuable assets at risk of being destroyed by wildfire.
- Providing an opportunity for community residents and organizations to voice concerns about public safety issues, and protect social and economic interests in the community.
- Increasing the chances that homes in the community will continue to be insured. Insurance companies can assess the potential liability of a community's ability to survive a wildfire *before* writing insurance policies. They know your community's fire risk. In some areas, Fire Safe Councils have actually involved insurers in increasing community safety, which has resulted in continued commitments by insurance companies to keep their book of business in town.

## **SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE**

A Fire Safe Council is a coalition of public and private sector organizations that share a common, vested interest in wildfire prevention and loss mitigation. Councils are dedicated to saving lives and reducing fire losses by making their communities fire safe. Towns, regional areas and counties all have formed Fire Safe Councils.

### **Statewide Montana Fire Safe Council**

*Goal:* Preserve Montana's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Montanans to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe. The Council works to meet this goal by combining the expertise, resources and distribution channels of its members.

Formed officially March 2, 2007, the Council has united its diverse membership to speak with one voice about fire safety.

**Is a local Fire Safe Council right for your community?**

**If your goal is to increase the safety of residents, and better protect homes and businesses from fire, then the answer is YES!**

## STARTING A LOCAL COUNCIL

### Membership Recruitment

Your first step is to recruit members. First, identify the potential public and private partners in your community who are at risk of loss from wildfire. Here are some examples of potential members:

- **The Fire Department** can provide advice and expertise on fire safety.
- **Utilities**, such as the water district or the electric company, have a vested interest in fire safety because their services may be disrupted when a fire occurs. The electric company is especially concerned about trees growing into power lines and starting fires.
- **Environmental Groups** are especially concerned about habitat loss for endangered species when fires occur, as well as a number of other fire-related issues.
- **Insurance Industry Representatives** are interested in insuring and continuing to insure communities that have taken fire safety measures.
- **Forestry Contractors** will help begin the network needed for project completion.
- **Landscapers** can provide information on fire safe landscaping and help educate homeowners about choosing more fire-resistant plants.
- **Real Estate Agents** are the first people homeowners meet when they are moving into the neighborhood. Real estate agents may educate homeowners about potential fire danger and provide information on how homeowners can protect themselves.
- **The Parks and Recreation Department** seeks to protect natural areas from damaging wildfire and may educate the community about fire's role in the ecosystem.
- **Local Political Leaders** can mobilize the community to become fire safe and represent community fire safe concerns/initiatives in government.
- **Homeowner Associations** have a vested interest in protecting their individual homes, as well as their neighborhoods, from wildfires.
- **Other Local Groups** that have a vested interest in fire safety; this could and should be just about anyone who lives or works in the area.

## **Send an Invitation**

The next step is to write a letter to each potential partner explaining the Fire Safe Council's goals and inviting them to a Fire Safe Council meeting. Here is a prototype invitation letter.

### ***SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER***

NAME  
NAME OF ORGANIZATION  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear [NAME],

We are all concerned about the potentially devastating effects of wildfire on our families, our homes, businesses and neighborhoods. As we enjoy living and working in the scenic surroundings of [NAME OF COMMUNITY], we must realize that our beautiful community could be destroyed in a wildfire. To help protect ourselves from this threat and minimize our potential losses, I invite you to attend a formation meeting of the [YOUR CITY/COUNTY] Fire Safe Council.

The purpose of the meeting is to bring together public and private organizations to discuss fire safety in our community. This community-based fire safety concept was born out of the statewide Fire Safe Montana Council whose goal is to preserve Montana's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Montanans to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe.

Your Fire Safe Council can be used as a forum to share information, solve problems and link related programs in ways that can save money and time

The success of the council depends upon the willingness and participation of PEOPLE/ORGANIZATIONS like YOU/YOURS. Your participation is essential to protecting what you value most. Your views will be shared with local decision-makers, as well as private companies.

The Fire Safe Council meeting is scheduled for [DATE and TIME] at [LOCATION] in [CITY]. Attached is a brochure on the Council for your review, as a well as an overview of some of the statewide Council's accomplishments. In addition, if you'd like to explore the Council concept further, please visit the Fire Safe Montana Council's web site at <http://www.firesafemt.org>

I hope you can join us in this valuable community service. I will contact you in a few days to determine your attendance. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER]. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Best regards,

YOUR NAME  
YOUR ORGANIZATION

## PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

### **Contact Local Fire Officials**

As the local fire safety experts, your fire departments, Federal, State, and local, will have valuable insight about your community's fire environment. The departments may be able to provide program ideas that will help you motivate the council to action and create some early successes.

### **Ask Fire Officials About your local Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan outlines a strategy for how the fire departments and the community can work together to minimize losses and costs from wildland fires. It can target the specific fire risk areas in your community to help you focus the Council's efforts. It can create community support for fire safe programs.

### **Contact Local Fire Safe Groups**

Contacting members of other Fire Safe Councils is a good way to learn about successful grassroots fire safe programs. Access some local Council's at <http://www.firesafemt.org>

### **Contact for Speakers**

The Fire Safe Montana Council can make arrangements for a Fire Safe Council representative to speak to your community about the benefits of forming a Fire Safe Council.

### **Select a Meeting Location**

Hold the first meeting in a neutral location such as the local community center or library. Try to select a meeting place where everyone will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns.

### **Create an Agenda**

Fire safety can be a complicated issue. At your first Fire Safe Council meeting, keep your agenda simple and uncomplicated. Agenda items should be broad, topical areas that can be used as starting points for productive discussions. The goal of the first meeting is to begin a dialogue and build consensus. Avoid discussing controversial, divisive topics at the first meeting.

### **Appoint a Facilitator**

Choose one person to direct the first meeting. A good facilitator has the ability to work with people and achieve consensus. The facilitator should be neutral, and understand the diverse views of members and be able to put them in the context of the larger issue. He or she should not be easily swayed by opinion and should have the ability to evaluate issues and concerns raised by members.

## *SAMPLE AGENDA FOR FIRST MEETING*

### **FIRE SAFE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA (DATE)**

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions
- III. Montana's Fire Problem/The Community Wildfire Protection Plan
  - A. Map of (NAME OF COMMUNITY/COUNTY'S) fire danger
- IV. The Fire Safe Council Concept
- V. Goals and Objectives
- VI. High Fire Hazard Areas
- VII. Fire Safe Projects
- VIII. Appointment of Executive Officers
- IX. Open Forum
- X. Next Meeting

### **AT THE MEETING**

#### **Take Meeting Minutes**

Meeting minutes are valuable because the group can refer back to the minutes to recall the events of past meetings. This is an excellent way to keep track of new ideas and responsibilities for projects. Whoever takes meeting minutes should be willing to type them up after the meeting. It is also a good idea to mail or e-mail minutes to Council members to keep them updated.

#### **Develop a Membership Roster**

Circulate an attendance sheet during the meeting and have Council members write down their names, addresses, telephone numbers and, if available, their e-mail addresses. The person taking meeting minutes should type up a Fire Safe Council roster so that members can get in touch with each other between meetings.

#### **Display a Map of the Community**

The map will help the Council identify areas of concern and high fire hazard areas in the community. It will help the Council prioritize potential fire safe projects. Your fire departments may be able to help create a map showing specific fire danger areas.

#### **Share Fire Safety Brochures and Materials**

Your local fire department may have information it can share. And visit the State Fire Safe Council's web site for brochures on [fire safe landscaping](#), [fire safety for inside and outside the home](#), a [fire safe homeowners checklist](#) and more. The State Fire Safe Council is at [www.FireSafeMt.org](http://www.FireSafeMt.org), or call the statewide Council at 406-431-8718 to request materials.

## **MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MEETING**

### **Welcome**

Greet the newly formed Council by welcoming members to the first meeting. Most of them probably have very busy schedules. They may be attending this initial meeting to determine if their membership is a good use of their time. Express gratitude for their attendance and convey a vision that this Fire Safe Council can make a difference in the community.

### **Introductions**

Ask everyone in the room to introduce themselves and their organizational affiliation. Revealing the group's diversity will allow everyone to see how wildfire affects the entire community.

### **Montana's Fire Problem**

The first order of business should be to explain the fire problem. A fire safety expert, can help the group understand the role of fire in the ecosystem and how it affects your community. Ask the fire official to also discuss the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

### **The Fire Safe Council Concept**

To explain the Fire Safe Council concept, consider showing the Fire Safe Montana DVD. This video explains the nature of fire and how forming a Fire Safe Council can help minimize the losses caused by devastating wildfires. The video also briefly explains the main steps to forming a Fire Safe Council. Alternatively, you may contact the FireSafe Montana at, 406-431-8718 and request a Fire Safe Montana representative to attend the initial meeting and present the Fire Safe Council concept to the group.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The facilitator should ask Council members to list major goals and objectives. Turn the meeting into a brainstorming session by asking each participant to answer the question: "What do I want this group to accomplish?" This will help identify fire safety problems or objectives important to the group. Try posting the ideas on a board and include them in the meeting minutes.

### **High Fire Hazard Areas**

A map will help the Council identify geographic areas of concern and high fire hazard areas in the community. The Council should refer to the map to help prioritize potential fire safe projects. The Council should not only consider existing neighborhoods, but also look at business districts and areas of planned residential and commercial development that are near forest or wildland. The Council should also identify the community's assets at risk -- all the people, places, natural resources and other assets that need protection from wildfire.

## **Fire Safe Projects**

Identify projects the Council can accomplish and assign oversight responsibility to members. The person or group will provide progress reports to the Council at future meetings or ask for further assistance, if necessary. The project should be put into a time frame with a target date of completion.

*Ideas--* With the support of home owner associations plan and prepare:

- Shaded fuel breaks around vulnerable subdivisions.
- Defensible/Survivable space around homes in vulnerable subdivisions.
- Construct (or designate) additional ingress and egress evacuation routes.
- Reduce fuel loading on all roads within a subdivision to provide for safe travel during fires.

## **Appointment of Executive Officers**

Typically, executive officers include a chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer and secretary. However, many types of council have designated only a chair and co-chair. Your council should determine the leadership it feels most comfortable with.

## **Open Forum**

Give Council members the opportunity to make announcements or raise issues that were not addressed in another area of the agenda.

## **Next Meeting**

Set a date. Do not postpone setting a date and then contact all the participants later. Since everyone is at one location at the current meeting, this is the best time to announce a date. You may want to secure the location and some potential dates for the next meeting *beforehand* to make scheduling easier. Over time, consider setting a meeting schedule for the year or assigning a constant, specific meeting date. (e.g. the third Tuesday of each month).

**SAMPLE MEETING MINUTES**

**TRICO FireSafe Working Group**

Serving the Montana counties of Lewis & Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater

Meeting Minutes

December 13, 2007

<b>NAME</b>	<b>AGENCY/GROUP</b>
John Thompson	BLM – Butte Field Office
Terina Mullen	BLM – Butte Field Office
Sonny Stiger	Trico
Bob Fry	MT DES
Dave Larsen	Helena NF
Sally Buckles	Jefferson County DES
Steve Larson	Helena Fire
Lance Hartshorn	
Mike McFerrin	MPFS
Amy Teegarden	Helena NF
Leo Dutton	LC County Sheriff's Office
Pat McKelvey	Lewis & Clark County
Kent Atwood	Montana DES
Tom Lythgoe	Jefferson County
Ray Todd	Valley Land Services
Deeda Richard	Grant writing and consulting
Gary Ellingson	NMI
Paul Spengler	LC County DES
Bob Decker	The Policy Institute
Frank Preskor	L&C County Health
Duane Harp	Helena NF
Fred Thompson	Helena NF
Greg Morris	Townsend RD
Jim Cancroft	NMI
Don Clark	City of Helena Water Treatment

- Amy Teegarden called the meeting to order at 0902 and led introductions.
- Treasurer's report shows \$1,260.92 in the checking account. FireSafe Montana membership dues (\$30) should be paid. November's meeting minutes were approved as corrected, per Sonny Stiger.
- Projects update: Copies circulated.

<b>Program</b>	<b># Contacts</b>	<b>\$ Available</b>	<b>\$ Expensed</b>	<b>\$ Match</b>	<b>Complete</b>	<b>Acres</b>
NFP#4	94	\$475,000.00	\$263,118.55	\$78,397.62	60	263.8
NFP#5		\$100,000				
BLM North2		\$50,000				
BLM South4	38	\$170,000	\$23,451.04	\$12,256.00	5	23.9

BLM Ed 3	-	\$5,000	\$4,279.67	\$1,895.88	-	-
JeffCo RAC	13		\$7,050	\$3,950.00	5	13.3
FireSafe MT	-	\$50,000.00		-	-	-

- Smokey Bear Balloon Event. Will occur in conjunction with Wildfire Awareness Week and will be in Helena on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Pat went through the personnel needs for the day. Would like to get the FDs involved. We should make this the “big” prevention and education event for Trico this year. Amy recommended we keep this as a standing agenda item throughout the months prior to May. Need to coordinate with DNRC.
- Sonny Stiger Award. Sonny provided background information on the award. Nominations are due by the January meeting; committee will consider and award will be presented at the FireSafe Montana conference in February.
- FireSafe Montana Conference. Will be held in Bozeman at the Holiday Inn (**Feb 25-27**). Monday starts off with a BLM session for cooperators, and the conference begins after lunch. Agenda highlights and more information can be found on the website; watch for updates.
- Development Standards Working Group. Sonny talked about the proposed zoning regulations, which require mitigation of fuels. They will have a preliminary map, and neighborhoods will “zone themselves.” Tom Lythgoe explained how some counties zone from the “bottom up.”
- L&C County Burning Variance. Frank Preskor explained the current variance and procedures. They will be updating this winter. They could build in an approval process for mitigation type projects. Gary asked about getting the variance programmatically. John Thompson asked about smoke modeling information. Would still need to go to DEQ. Greg Morris asked about the redundancy of getting permission from both entities. Pat will get the form to get the variance for Trico’s mitigation program. Frank will do some further research.
- The Governor’s Emergency Summit will be held in Billings (**April 21-25**). Kent will be putting together the firesafe, state mitigation plan and fire restrictions section.
- Audit findings. Pat read the findings (excluded party list, reports and reimbursement amounts, agreement with contractors, homeowner match, radio advertising).
- Pat passed around information about the Red Flag program in Burns, OR.
- Forest Management Conference in February in Reno. [www.2008fmc.com](http://www.2008fmc.com)
- Pat mentioned that the BLM mitigation specialists (Terina, Dena, Karly, Terry) received a national Excellence in Ecosystem Management Award for Community Assistance.
- Pat has had interest from landscapers and others. Several attended today’s meeting to see how they can become involved

**With nothing further, meeting was adjourned at 1125.**

**Next meeting: January 10<sup>th</sup> at 0900.**

## THE SECOND MEETING

### **Develop a Mission Statement**

A mission statement is a statement of purpose and the ideal or basic reason for the existence of the organization. It should be broad in scope and define the organization's philosophy. In addition, it should be short and easy to understand. Based on your discussion of what everyone wanted to accomplish with the Fire Safe Council, create a draft mission statement and present it at the second meeting. Once you or another Council member has proposed a mission statement, the Council should review and finalize it.

Consider reviewing mission statements from other Fire Safe Councils. Here is the mission statement for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

*"The mission of the Fire Safe Montana Council is to assemble diverse interests in a unified coalition that will work together on solutions to reduce the loss of lives and property from the threat of fire in and around Montana's communities.*

### **Determine Overall Objectives**

After establishing a mission statement, Council members should think about how the Council will fulfill the mission. Objectives state what will have occurred if the mission is successfully achieved. When determining objectives, make sure they relate to the mission and that they are measurable, achievable and results-oriented.

Consider reviewing the objectives from other Fire Safe Councils. Here are the objectives for the statewide Fire Safe Council:

- *Unite Council members to speak with one voice on fire safety*
- *Use marketing expertise and communication channels of Council members to increase distribution of fire prevention education materials*
- *Discuss and evaluate legislation pertaining to fire safety*
- *Empower grass roots organizations and individuals to create fire safe communities*

### **Finalize a Name and/or Logo**

Choose a name for your Council to give it an identity. Most local Fire Safe Councils have chosen to include a specific city or region in their name. Nevada County Fire Safe Council, FireSafe Marin or Tri-Co FireSafe Working Group are examples.

Pick a logo for the group to establish an identity in the community. Use the logo on letterhead, meeting agendas, fire safe project signs, brochures or anything you want to associate with the council. Many Fire Safe Councils have adopted the statewide Fire Safe Council's logo, while others have either altered this logo to fit their Council's needs or created an entirely new logo. Download the statewide Council's logo from [www.FireSafeMt.org](http://www.FireSafeMt.org).

### **Revisit Projects and Determine Feasibility**

Persuade Council members to examine their resources and determine how each member can contribute to a project's success. Many new Councils choose to begin with small projects and work their way up to larger undertakings. Small projects will yield faster results and gratification, which will build momentum for the group.

### **Assign Responsibility for Projects**

Ask for volunteers and be encouraging, as some members may be shy or hesitant because this is a new area of knowledge for them. Some Council members may have a special interest in specific projects, or may be able to commit certain resources. Make sure that all projects undertaken by the Council have been assigned to an individual or group of individuals to ensure that the project gets done. Form committee's as needed.

### **Target Future Members**

Fire safety involves the whole community and the health of your council depends upon constant efforts to involve more people. Enlist volunteers to focus on membership recruitment. Remember, it may take several months to convince certain partners to participate in your Council. In fact, some partners may not join the Council until a fire threatens. This fire will create a window of opportunity. During this period of heightened awareness and concern, your Council can attract new members and advance fire safe programs.

## **THE THIRD MEETING**

### **Approve the Mission Statement and Goals**

If you have not done so, reach consensus and approve the mission statement.

### **Ask Members to Provide Status Reports**

This will promote a feeling of progress and, eventually, a sense of accomplishment. Praise success and troubleshoot roadblocks. These status reports will generate excitement for projects and help sustain the Council's momentum.

### **Look to the Future**

Although the Council may have temporarily exhausted its short-term resources, it is important to continue to look at the future of the Council. Brainstorm a few ideas for possible future fire safety projects and distribute these ideas to the

Council. This will encourage Council members to begin thinking about tackling the next project or inspire them to initiate new ideas.

*Ideas:*

- **Community Awareness Project** – Partner with a local sports team to host an event to promote awareness of fire danger, including a display at the stadium/ballpark, informational handouts and children’s competitions.
- **Alternative Water Source Identification** – Community-wide program to identify and provide a standard pavement or curb marker for homes with pools and spas which could serve as additional and alternative sources of water for firefighters during an extensive fire.
- **Toll free 1-800 Fire Safe Phone Line** – Hosted by a local phone company.
- **Fire Safe Outreach Teams** -- Volunteers trained and organized in advance to answer questions, provide speakers and give presentations when seasonal change and heightened public awareness or anxiety create “teachable moments.”

### **Non-Profit Status**

Some local Fire Safe Councils have obtained non-profit status so they could more easily accept donations. The Council should weigh all options and fully investigate the requirements for non-profit status before making a decision.

## **SUSTAINING MOMENTUM**

It is vital to maintain enthusiasm and interest in the Council among members. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

### **Recruit New Members**

New members will bring new ideas to the Council. Review the original invitation list you sent to the community. Identify invitees who do not attend Council meetings and persuade them to come to the next meeting. Is there anyone missing from the list?

### **Ask Each Member to Bring An Idea For a Fire Safe Project**

Different members have different areas of expertise. Tap the diversity of Council members by encouraging members to think of creative projects that interest them and their organizations. Members will devote more time and energy to a project when they can see a direct benefit.

### **Continue to Communicate With Existing Fire Safe Councils**

More established Councils have already experienced many of the growing pains your Council may experience and can provide insight on what works and what

doesn't. Invite members of another Council to attend your Council meeting and speak.

### **Get Help from the Statewide Council**

The statewide Fire Safe Council is a source for videos, brochures, public service announcements and helpful hints. Use the Council's materials in your community. Canvass the neighborhood providing fire safety brochures to homeowners. Or work with your local cable television provider to broadcast a fire safety video or public service announcement. For example, The Tri-Co FireSafe Working Group has produced a video with local people showing the need for and how to deal with the Defensible/Survivable space issue in the Tri-County area of Lewis & Clark, Broadwater, and Jefferson Counties.

### **Participate in Community Events**

Gain visibility by setting up a booth at a community fair and handing out fire safe information. Or, educate the community about fire safe landscaping by creating a small fire safe garden for fair-goers to enjoy.

### **Generate Publicity--- Celebrate the Success!**

Once a fire safe project is underway, share your good news! Call the local daily or weekly newspaper, and radio and television stations. Tell the editors about the Council's fire safe project and how it will benefit the community. Or, write a news release about the project, send it to local media and follow up with a phone call to determine if they will cover it.