

To the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors:

This discussion item is critical to all of our well being, in that without the fire safety ordinance, we are only as good as our worst neighbor, insofar as being protected from a wildfire catastrophe. Our residents face risks from wildfire because each year during the winter rains the vegetation takes off, and then in late spring and summer the overgrowth dries out and becomes fuel for the advancing wildfires. We must maintain our own fire safe properties; and make sure our neighbors are doing the same for our own protection. Therein lies the problem, some of our neighbors are content to have all the tall weeds on their property, and refuse to abate the dry grasses, fallen branches and dead trees from their properties. We have asked Fire Chiefs and Fire Marshals to intervene and they have been very supportive. When a notice of infraction is presented to the land/home owner, most will respond favorably, but there still remain the more obstinate residents that refuse. This is the worst situation because we do not have a fire safety ordinance with an enforceable abatement provision in our County. So this property acts as the match head for the development and creates unnecessary risks for all.

The Fire Safe Councils (FSC) within the communities have done a great deal to encourage all of us to maintain fire safe properties, and have been instrumental in eliminating the vegetative fuels within residential areas and on roadsides. They have been very effective in areas where they are organized, but unfortunately there are some subdivisions where they are not represented, and it is necessary for homeowners in those areas to work together to encourage all residents to act responsibly. Even with the work the FSCs do to educate and facilitate equipment on site, there are those same obstinate owners that refuse to participate. The FSCs are a great resource but have no clout when the owners who refuse to comply.

Increasing wildfire probability continues to pose major risks to residents, and the local economy. It is necessary for our County to have the tools to enforce the abatement of hazardous vegetation and combustible materials. To do so, is to adopt the County Fire Safety and Enforceable Abatement Ordinance. For those of you that may not be aware, Sonoma County has the Sonoma County Fire Safety Ordinance (**Sonoma County, CA Municipal Code, Chapter 13/13A**) currently in effect which includes a section on enforceable abatement of Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Materials. The document is well written and stood the test of time, and it is suggested consideration be given to adapting this ordinance content to the needs of Mendocino County rather than investing the time and energy to start from scratch.

In summary, an effective ordinance can ensure greater due diligence and encourage greater compliance by property owners to clear combustible materials from their properties; and additionally provide the County with the tools needed to adequately enforce the code and recover its costs for abatement.

Sincerely,

John and Karen Moon

