

January 23, 2025

Dear Neighbor,

The Southern California wildfire disaster with loss of life and homes came as a total surprise because nothing of this epic proportion has ever happened. It seems that there is no longer a wildfire season. It can happen at any time in the right conditions. In recent years fast-moving brush fires have occurred on Mount Dallas properties, caused by sparks from metal machinery. Last year there was a lightning strike that hit an approximately 200-year-old fir tree on Mount Dallas that could have ignited a fire. The Guard property caught on fire in 1982 from lightning. That fire became a 6 day “root” fire, going underground and popping up at new locations.

As people who live in a place that’s susceptible to wildfire, what can one do to minimize risk? You can start by creating a defensible space around your home. The San Juan Islands Conservation District has valuable information posted on their website to guide you: www.sanjuanislandscd.org/wildfire-preparedness. You can also make an appointment with our local Fire Department to assess your property and get suggestions to make it safer. It takes ongoing vigilant observation to ensure that your property is safe for you and for your adjoining neighbors. It is important to eliminate ladder fuels that are on the ground, bushes such as ocean spray that are highly flammable, and to limb up trees to protect them from these ladder fuels. To help prevent crown fires that jump from tree to tree, the best practice is to remove the thin trunked fir trees that are often dead and crowding the older firs. This creates a healthier forest for the more established trees.

The fact that Mt. Dallas is one way in and out, presents another problem. Depending on the severity of a fire and its location, the fire department may not be able to get to us. It is also unknown how long it would take to get air support. So in addition to safeguarding our homes, we should also strive to clear our roadsides of ladder fuels as best we can, so fire personnel can reach us, and we have a way out if needed.

It can feel overwhelming, but by taking things step by step, on an ongoing basis, we can all make our neighborhood safer. A few weekends ago, a group of neighbors cleared debris along one small section of Mount Dallas Road. It was amazing to see what a group of five can accomplish in a few hours. Consider contacting your neighbors who live nearby to organize mini work parties. Now is a good time of year to clean things up and safely burn debris collected.

Another thing to think about is how to communicate with each other in an emergency. Start by exchanging contact information with your neighbors. Sharing contact information enables us to alert each other to emergency situations, and to check in to make sure

someone is okay. Currently, the password protected portion of the MDA website lists contact information for those who agreed to have their information posted. We will be sending out another email soon asking if you would like to be added to that list. We are also exploring electronic options which could quickly communicate emergency information to neighbors who sign up for the service, while keeping their personal contact information private.

Lastly, let's be aware of the importance of water conservation. Although it may not feel like it now, Washington state continues to experience drought conditions, and as spring turns into summer, we know how dry things get. There are small steps all of us can take throughout the year to conserve water. Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth, shaving, or lathering your hands. Take short showers instead of baths. Repair leaks as soon as possible. Collect rainwater to use on your landscape.

There are several websites that provide guidance on how to prevent fires and prepare for emergencies. **We urge you to peruse these sites to see how you can be best prepared.**

- San Juan County Emergency Preparedness, Islands Ready: www.islandsready.org
- San Juan Conservation District, Wildfire Preparedness: www.sanjuanislandscd.org/wildfire-preparedness
- National Fire Protection Association, Firewise: www.firewise.org

Let's keep fire prevention and emergency preparedness always in mind, and let's have conversations with each other about how we are approaching these issues. Together we can all make a difference.

Warm regards,
Your Mount Dallas Board

Matt Moss, President
Bill Severson, Treasurer
Jill Staton, Secretary
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www.mountdallas.com