



# FIRE DISTRICT NEWS

WINTER 2009

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## A Letter from the Fire Chief

The type of fire we experienced with the 2007 Angora Fire had been anticipated for at least 10 years in the Tahoe Basin. I can also say that every fire district in the Tahoe Basin has fire hazards in their jurisdictions which are similar to those present in the area prior to the Angora Fire. Why do fire hazardous conditions exist? There are several reasons I would like to discuss.

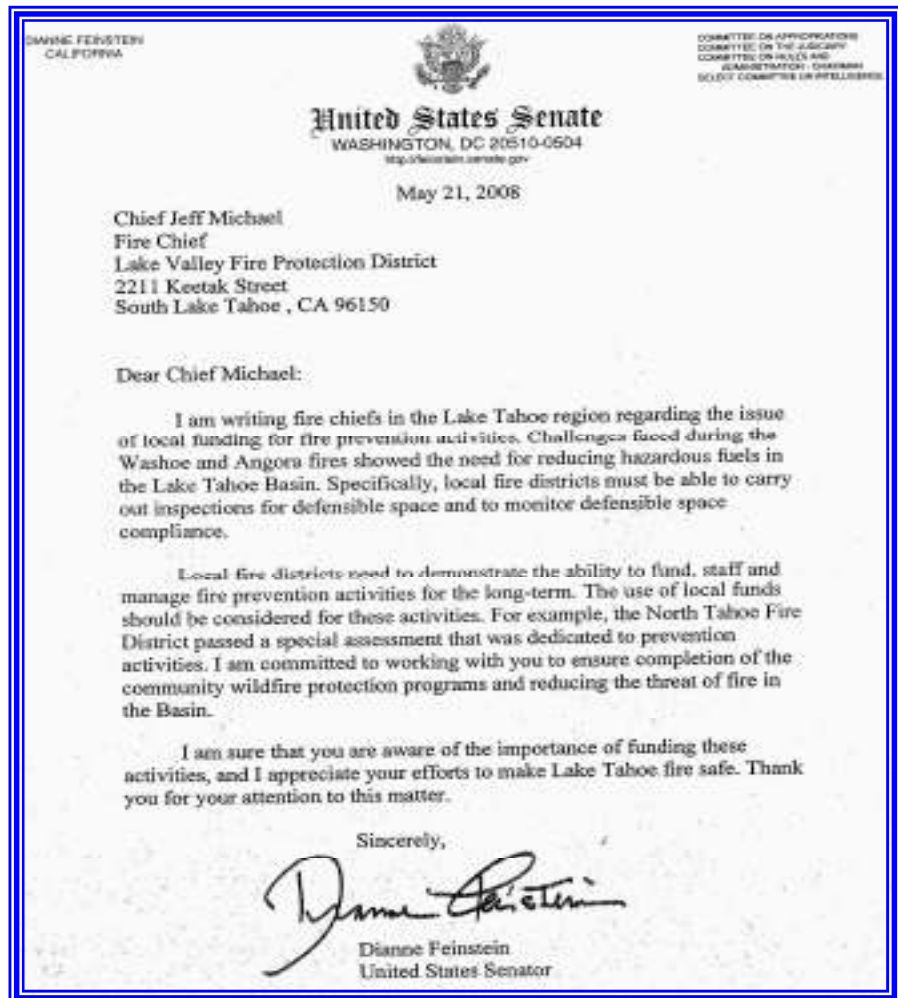
First and foremost is the condition of the forest. The re-growth of the forest after the clear cutting during the late 1800s and early 1900s resulted in the wrong species mix which has increased our risk of catastrophic wildfire. Add to that about a century of fire suppression, drought conditions, and the lack of resources to complete tree thinning and we're left with a tinder dry and overgrown forest with combustible debris littering the forest floor.

Second is the non-compliance with California Public Resource Code (PRC) 4291. PRC 4291 states that all homeowners are responsible for making their own property fire safe. Compliance with PRC 4291 requires 100 feet of clearance around your home. This doesn't mean clear cutting or denuding your property but it does require that trees are systematically removed or trimmed up depending on how many or how close they are to each other and your house. Fire districts are authorized to inspect properties for compliance with the PRC and may determine what actions will be needed to make your home fire resistive to an oncoming wildland fire.

We lost 254 homes in the Angora Fire. These homeowners had no place to call home right after the fire. They lost everything they had, including in some cases their beloved pets. The anger, frustration and sorrow were one of the worst things I have ever seen in my life. We are your fire department; we have tremendous passion for the job we do. For the last 30 years of my career we have always been able to help you through all of your calls for help. I can only attempt to explain the pain, sorrow and frustration we all feel for the loss of so many homes. I have lived in Tahoe since 1968. I know many of the fire victims personally. The fire impacted so many people in so many ways that were totally unimaginable by all of us. I say us because we are all in this together.

The aftermath has continued through the rebuilding process, getting through the regulatory agencies, the building department and yes, the fire department and all of the new fire related building codes. The healing process is going forward but can never reach 100% because so many things lost in the fire can never be replaced. Pictures of lost loved ones, family

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## California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission

In August 2007, Nevada Governor Jim Gibbons and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger created the California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission (Commission) to review the laws, policies, and practices that contributed to the vulnerability of the Tahoe Basin to wildfire. Over the course of eight months, the Commission heard from many Basin residents, fire professionals, land managers, environmental regulators, scientists, and others. By March 2008, 90 recommendations were formulated by the Commission to be forwarded to the Governors of California and Nevada. The Commission's recommendations are organized into six categories which together constitute a plan for reducing the Basin's vulnerability to catastrophic wildfire.

- Category 1: Environmental Protection
- Category 2: Issues of Governance
- Category 3: Community and Homeowner Fire Prevention
- Category 4: Forest and Fuels Management
- Category 5: Fire Suppression
- Category 6: Funding

The Commission's first order priority for any situation was life protection, then property and then the environment. On May 27, 2008 Governor Gibbons and Governor Schwarzenegger ratified the Commission's report. The complete report is available on the web at <http://resources.ca.gov/TahoeFireCommission/>.

Many of the Fire Commission's recommendations have already been implemented at Lake Tahoe. For example, TRPA rules changed to allow homeowners more flexibility with tree removal for defensible space purposes. Public officials create a clear message regarding the compatibility of defensible space and best management practices (BMPs). CAL FIRE provided additional fire suppression and prevention services as a result of the Commission's recommendations.

## Prescribed Fire in Your Neighborhood

**The Lake Valley Fire Protection District may conduct a prescribed burn near your home.**

Prescribed fire refers to the controlled application of fire under specified weather conditions that help restore health to the forest. By reducing hazardous fuel accumulations on the forest floor, encouraging the new growth of native vegetation, and maintaining the many plant and animal species whose habitats depend on periodic fire, prescribed burning may prevent catastrophic damage resulting from a wildfire in our community. Please let us know if you have any questions about the use of prescribed fire in our District.

- **Some fires are left unattended** once we determine they are under control. If conditions allow, prescribed fires will not be extinguished. We closely monitor weather and provide regular patrols of the area.
- **Fire looks bigger at night.** You will see glowing in the forest and some individual trees or logs with flames. This is normal.
- **Smoke is normal and temporary.** Smoke may last several days. See the back of this flyer for more information on smoke management and health precautions.

### For More Information

**Please call the Lake Valley Fire & Fuels Management Program at (530)577-2447 for more information or (530)577-3737 for immediate concerns.**

Please call (888)332-2876 for permissive burn day information. You may also call the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District at (530)621-6662.



heirlooms and health issues that are only starting to manifest. The fire happened a year and a half ago and some of the victims are still trying to settle with their insurance companies. Can we reduce the risk of future wildfires? Only by working together will we succeed, by forming partnerships between the major landowners and agencies: the US Forest Service, the California Tahoe Conservancy, CA State Parks, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the Lahontan Water Board, the fire district and you the property owner.

Five years ago Lake Valley Fire acquired a grant to supply chipping services to all residents of the district. Over the years we have expanded this program, with additional grants, to include defensible space inspectors and a fuel reduction crew that will also fight fires in the District. These grants are drying up but the work needs to continue. We need your help in funding our fuel reduction program.

In the next few months we will be proposing a benefit assessment that will enable the District to continue our efforts in reducing the threat of another Angora Fire. In order to continue our program, we need to secure about \$500,000 per year which would equate to roughly a \$70 per year assessment on improved parcels and \$25 per unimproved parcel. I know these are some of the toughest economic times we've ever had here in Tahoe but the simple fact is we can't afford another catastrophic wildfire. If the assessment passes, it would only be used for fuel reduction, wildland fire fighting activities and related equipment and infrastructure. Funding would not be used to increase current fire fighter staff levels. We will still actively pursue grant funding, which could lower the assessment needed for a particular year. No one can predict what future funding sources might become available, but all future assessments will be based on the grant dollars the fire district receives.

We need your input to help us move forward with the fuels reduction program, including how to pay for it. Three other fire districts around the lake currently have similar benefit assessments in place and others are considering them. The Bi-State Fire Commission report following the Angora Fire stated these type of benefit assessments are necessary and even our United States Senator Dianne Feinstein urged us to take this kind of action.

Please take a minute to answer the questions on the enclosed survey. We really need your help and support in making our District safe from another catastrophic wildland fire.

Jeff Michael, Fire Chief  
Lake Valley Fire Protection District  
530.577-3737  
michael@caltahoefire.net

**MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE  
BENEFIT ASSESSMENT IS AVAILABLE AT  
OUR WEBSITE:**

[www.lakevalleyfire.net](http://www.lakevalleyfire.net)

### What's the Latest on Tree Marking/Removal and Pine Needles?

Regarding removal of trees on private property:

- Trees over 14 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) or 4 1/2 feet require a permit to be removed. (In the past, 6 inch DBH was the requirement. Rarely will you find trees over 14 inch DBH to be a fire hazard.)
- Trees under 14 inch DBH do not require any permit at all to be removed.
- Call 530.577-2447 for a tree permit or recommendation on which tree should be removed for defensible space.

Regarding fallen needles and leaves:

- **Within 5 feet** of the house, remove routinely throughout fire season.
- From **5 feet to 30 feet** of the house, remove every spring by May 1. Needles and leaves that fall after the spring removal period can accumulate on the ground as long as they do not create a fire hazard.
- **More than 30 feet** from the house, do not allow fallen needles and leaves to exceed a depth of 3 inches.



**After reading this  
important  
information from  
Lake Valley Fire  
District, please  
respond using the  
enclosed  
questionnaire.**

**WINTER  
SHOVELING  
TIPS**



Think twice if you:

- have had a heart attack or have other forms of heart disease
- have high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels
- are a smoker
- lead a sedentary lifestyle

Consider hiring a student or using a volunteer service if you are a senior.

Shovel at least 1-2 hours after eating and avoid caffeine and nicotine.

Warm up first (walk or march in place for several minutes before beginning).

Start slow and continue at a slow pace (Suggestion: shovel for 5-7 minutes and rest 2-3 minutes).

Drink lots of water to prevent dehydration.

Shovel early and often; new snow is easier to shovel

Take frequent breaks

LAKE VALLEY VOLUNTEER  
FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION  
2211 Keetak St  
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From Zip  
Code  
96150

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