

CAL FIRE marks Wildfire Awareness

Fires occur throughout the state on a daily basis during fire season. To encourage Californians to prepare for this year's fire season, Governor Schwarzenegger has proclaimed May 3-9, Wildfire Awareness Week 2009. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the California Fire Safe Council are working together throughout the week to educate Californians on the importance of taking fire safety measures now.

Since fire is a natural and inevitable part of California's environment, living here means learning to live with fire. CAL FIRE and local Fire Safe Councils throughout the state are calling upon Californians to give their homes and property a fighting chance against wildfire this season. Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit Chief Dale Hutchinson is urging all residents who live in the state responsibility area of Madera, Mariposa or Merced counties to take measures now that will give firefighters a safe area to battle threatening flames.

Homeowners provide the defense, and CAL FIRE provides the offense. One-hun-

dred feet of defensible space is the owner's responsibility. This theme is meant to make homeowners realize that the actions they take now could be the ones that stop a fire in its tracks. If neighbors take those same steps, disaster could be avoided.

The single most important step is to provide clearance of all dry grass, brush and dead leaves at least 100 feet around all structures on the property. Incorporating fire safe landscaping into this "defensible space," and throughout the property, can be beautiful and functional.

Fire safe landscaping means strategically spacing fire resistant, drought tolerant plants around the perimeter of one's home and property. A local nursery is an excellent source for information about the types of these plants that grow well in the area. A bonus with fire resistant, drought tolerant landscaping is that it requires less water.

A complete homeowner checklist and additional fire preparedness information is available on the CAL FIRE Web site at www.fire.ca.gov and the Fire Safe Council Web site at www.firesafecouncil.org