



# FIRE Safe MARIN, 1992-2002

## *Celebrating the Past, Preparing For the Future*

FIRE Safe MARIN was one of California's first fire safe councils. Today, there are nearly 100 similar organizations throughout the state, and a California Fire Safe Council based in Sacramento.

The Oakland-Berkeley Hills Fire in October 1991 resulting in the loss of more than 2,000 homes was a wake-up call to many communities, especially those close by in the San Francisco Bay Area. Soon after this event, the Marin County Board of Supervisors issued a resolution to create a fire safety council. Supervisor Hal Brown became the Chairman of FIRE Safe MARIN and continues to serve in this capacity. The Marin County Fire Marshall began to examine a similar group in San Mateo which was involved in both public education and vegetation treatment.

Meanwhile, Marin Municipal Water District was also starting a community fire prevention organization. It wasn't long before the common ground between fire departments and natural resource agencies in Marin led to a formal partnership. These two efforts converged in 1992, and the group called itself "FIRE Safe MARIN".

By January 1993, FIRE Safe MARIN meetings open to the general public were being held at the Kentfield Fire District. The group relocated to meet in the offices of the Marin Conservation Corps for several years, and eventually established an independent office at the Marin Nexus volunteer center in San Rafael where the group continues to meet monthly.

From the beginning, it was clear that fire safety efforts needed to involve both the public and private sectors. PG&E, consulting firms, and several insurance companies soon became involved. The County Board of Supervisors, Marin Community Foundation, Fireman's Fund

Insurance Co., and PG&E provided financial support which sustained the organization. The Marin Conservation Corps developed specialized programs for fire hazard reduction, and was an important partner in many Fire Safe Marin projects.

Chipper Days were organized so residents could easily dispose of vegetation debris from around their homes. Fire inspectors were trained by to assess vegetation fire hazards during routine property inspections. Training in fire safe landscaping and construction was conducted for community planners and homeowners. FIRE Safe MARIN developed education materials, assisted neighborhoods with funding fuel reduction projects, and participated in the Marin Home Show, as well as several wildfire conferences.

Then, the Vision Fire occurred on Inverness Ridge in 1995. Like the Oakland fire, it was accelerated by the hot, dry, high-velocity Santa Ana-type winds characteristic of the region in the fall. The Vision Fire was started by an unextinguished, illegal campfire on state park land, then moved to national park lands and privately owned lands, and finally consumed nearly 12,000 acres in Point Reyes National Seashore and 48 homes on Inverness Ridge. This event illustrated once again that fire management needed to be a public-private endeavor, conducted cooperatively throughout adjacent wildlands.

In 1996, FIRE Safe MARIN, found itself developing an endorsement policy when it was called upon to support two pieces of local legislation, Measures A and L. Measure A, was a sales tax increase for management of county parks, open space and agricultural lands, including vegetation programs aimed at fire hazard reduction. Measure L was a per parcel fee to fund the "Fire Flow"

project, an upgrade of the MMWD water system to ensure water resources could be pumped adequately during a fire, and to make the system more resilient to earthquakes. At the time, the system included 850 miles of pipe, 92 of which would be replaced over a 15-year period.

The California Fire Plan established a framework for minimizing costs and losses associated with wildland fire. Assets at risk included real estate, as well as cultural, ecological, and recreational assets that could be damaged. This plan emphasized the need for fire safety zones around communities prone to wildland fire.

Then, the National Fire Plan, resulting from the devastating fire season of 2000, and over a decade of increasing losses in the wildland-urban interface, made federal funding available to assist communities with wildland fire protection. In 2001, FIRE Safe MARIN Projects began to receive funding from the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. A cooperative agreement was formed between the National Park Service and FIRE Safe MARIN to establish a fire prevention partnership. Projects in Marin were also funded through the Sacramento Regional Foundation which administers a wildfire prevention grant program for the Bureau of Land Management.

FIRE Safe MARIN is a network of many organizations and individuals who work together to reach the common goal of reducing wildland fire hazards and improving fire safety in Marin. Vegetation management to reduce hazardous fuels, water systems for fire suppression, road improvements for emergency access, and public education continue to be primary endeavors for FIRE Safe MARIN. New members are always welcome.

## FIRE Safe MARIN the First 10 Years

- 1992** - A small group of concerned fire & vegetation professionals begins meeting to discuss fire issues.
  - 1st Chipper Days offered by Marin County Fire Department.
  - "Green Can" program in conjunction with Mill Valley Refuse Co. offers bi-weekly pick up of vegetation debris.
- 1993** - FSM meetings open to general public.
  - 1st fire safe landscaping training for fire inspectors.
- 1994** - FIRE Safe MARIN logo designed.
- 1995** - Vision Fire burns 12,354 acres.
- 1996** - Fire Flow Project is launched.
  - FSM establishes fire safety guidelines for welding crews.
  - FSM is featured in the Fire Safe California Community Action Kit.
  - Fire safe landscaping guides published in cooperation with UC Cooperative Extension.
  - California state funds MCC's CalFIRE fuel reduction program as part of the Governor's Initiative.
- 1997** - 501-C3, Non-Profit Status established.
  - Independent office established at Marin Nexus.
  - FSM is the subject of a 15 min. video on fire safety which is broadcast by Marin TCI on Channel 31.
- 1998** - Special liability insurance policy acquired for board members and officers.
  - California Fire Plan implementation adds forestry and fuels specialists to the Marin County Fire Department staff.
- 1999** - Homeowner's Fire Protection Guide printed in the Marin Independent Journal.
  - FSM presents fire safety messages in Marin movie theaters.
- 2001** - National Fire Plan provides federal funding to many Fire Safe Marin projects.
- 2002** - FSM Council Coordinator hired
  - 10th Anniversary, FIRE Safe Marin
  - 20th Anniversary, MCC
  - 40th Anniversary, Point Reyes NS
  - 50th Anniversary, Tomales Bay SP
  - 90th Anniversary, MMWD

### FIRE SAFE MARIN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chair - Hal Brown, *Marin County Board of Supervisors*  
 President - Kent Julin, *Marin County Fire Department*  
 Vice President - Mike Stone, *Southern Marin Fire Protection District*  
 Treasurer - Carey Lando, *Marin County Dept. of Public Works*  
 Secretary - Pete Martin, *Marin County Fire Department (retired)*

### BOARD MEMBERS

Chris Bramham, *Marin County Parks and Open Space District*  
 Don Gasser, *Pacific Gas & Electric Company*  
 Mike Groshong, *Ross Valley Fire Department*  
 Mary Ellen Irwin, *San Rafael Fire Commission*  
 John Lando, *Marin Fire Chiefs Association*

Jim Huckins, *Dominican Neighborhood*  
 Casey May, *Marin Municipal Water District*  
 Mike Meszaros, *Inverness Public Utility District*  
 Keith Parker, *Marin County Fire Department*  
 Carl Sanders, *Marin Conservation Corps*  
 Hank Washow, *Marin County Sheriff's Dept. Office of Emergency Services*