

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

California

Worse-Case Scenario Provides Valuable Lesson

Ten thousand Girl Scouts, their parents and leaders, and a continuous line of eager participants at the BLM Fire Management booth...

Welcome to the 90th Anniversary of the Girl Scouts of northern California. The California State Office Fire and Aviation Program, with assistance from the Folsom Field Office fire and resources staff, participated in the event with the traditional wildfire displays, defensible space literature, and fire rig to produce an attractive and well-received exhibit. However, none of these items came close to the excitement and popularity of a new activity we being piloted for NIFC - a child-sized, hands-on model of a house that was anything but "fire safe" – in fact, the model had been prepared to resemble a worse-case scenario including:

- overgrown trees close to, and overhanging, the house;
- leaf litter covering the roof and yard;
- wood piles and a burn barrel adjacent to the home;
- a wood shake roof; and,
- a non-existent or covered street address.



Staff provides instructions for the Firewise activity to a team of scouts.



Girl scout team scampers to modify "their" hazardous home.

Small groups of scouts were introduced to their "new house located in the wildland-urban interface". Several brief concepts of defensible space were provided to the teams before they set out to make their new home more fire safe. The groups worked quickly to make their house more defensible – thinning trees, removing leaf litter from the roof, moving the wood pile and burn barrels away from the home, placing the spark arrestor on the chimney, "landscaping" the yard with lawns & walkways, changing roofing type to tile or

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composite, and making sure their address was clearly visible for firefighters and other emergency personnel.

With older groups, the activity was timed to add a competitive edge. The crowd watched, cheered, and snapped photos throughout the afternoon. When the group was finished or their time up, the staffers reviewed the modifications the group made, offered additional suggestions, and gave a thumbs up and a round of applause for the team's effort to improve their homes defensible space. Homeowner checklists and a Smokey Bear item were sent home with each child to reinforce the activity they just completed. As the next group was assembled and introduced to fire safe concepts, the house would again be reassembled with all its hazardous elements.

The line of people wanting to participate was very long and the staff exhausted by days end. But everyone left with a hands-on experience in creating defensible space that hopefully will influence the way they, and their parents, look at their *real* homes.

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The house model stands ready for a day full of defensible area lessons.



Parents and scout leaders photographing their scouts in action.

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A Little Help Goes a Long Way

The Mariposa County Fire Department serves many sparsely populated and dispersed communities in the central Sierra foothills of California. These communities have a severe fire history and rely primarily on the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for their wildland firefighting. However, when a fire ignites, it's not uncommon for the local volunteer fire department to be the first on the scene to provide initial attack until state crews arrive. With public and private land ownership located throughout the area, BLM's interest in supporting the local department's first responder efforts is high.

BLM's Folsom Field Office has worked closely with the county fire department to enhance their wildland fire equipment. The department recently was able to purchase several quick response vehicles with county funds. Unfortunately, this funding was unable to cover the specialized wildland firefighting equipment for the new trucks. The Fire Chief contacted BLM Folsom Fire Management Officer for assistance or suggestions on how to locate a pump unit for one of the vehicles that responds to public lands administered by the BLM. The timing of the call was perfect...the Chief was informed about the BLM's Rural Fire Assistance Program that had just opened its request for proposals period (which the department applied for and was successful in obtaining) and the Folsom office had just taken a slip-on pump out of service. The pump was available as excess property so its transfer was arranged. The local volunteer firefighters refurbished the unit and mounted it on the new truck. A few new hoses, a tune-up, and a fresh paint job put the unit back into mint condition.



The county's new quick responder truck now equipped with the BLM's former pump unit.

Over the course of this summer, the unit has stopped or slowed three fires on public lands using their new quick response unit equipped with the refurbished pump unit. All three fires occurred during a time when local federal and state fire equipment was assigned to fires elsewhere in California and Oregon. Given the timing and fire history of this area, there can be little doubt that a little help went a long way!

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