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Helpful mitigation tips to keep wildfires at bay

By Jennifer Wake



This vegetation fire in Sanders Ranch on Oct. 11, 2020 was ignited by a resident mowing tall grass. Photo courtesy MOFD

While lightening strikes were to blame for several recent California wildfires, the majority of fires are sparked from a human source, according to the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. On Aug. 9 ConFire announced two arson arrests and 14 fireworks-related citations by its Fire Investigation Unit investigators in the month of July. Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda police officers also issued five fireworks citations between July 11 and July 24.

But fireworks aside, even the simple act of mowing grass, if not done properly, can lead to disaster.

A one-alarm grass fire on Oct. 11, 2020 in Moraga's Sanders Ranch area that required four fire agencies to extinguish was caused by a resident who was mowing tall grass behind a house. The fire burned 30 acres and took two hours to contain. At the time of the blaze, Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker said that during his time with the district three of the four

significant vegetation fires had been caused by residents carrying out late season fuel mitigation work.

Due to the extreme drought conditions, vegetation is at a critical level of dryness and local fire districts urge residents to be cognizant of potential hazards involved in fuel mitigation. The California Wildland Fire Coordinating Group advises not to use lawn mowers on weeds or dry grass, reminding folks that metal blades striking rocks can start a fire, and to mow before 10 a.m. (but not when it's windy or excessively dry). The CWFCG also says to keep a shovel, fire extinguisher, and cell phone handy in case problems arise and to avoid driving cars on dry grass, since hot exhaust pipes and mufflers can be a source of ignition.

ConFire's FIU urges residents to help them fight the crime of arson across the county by calling the Arson Tip line at 1-866-50-ARSON. Tips can be anonymous, but all tips are treated confidentially. Fire investigators sometimes need additional information, so inclusion of name and phone number is encouraged. For other fire safety tips, visit www.cccfpd.org or www.mofd.org

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