

Nevada Wildland Urban Interface Fire Summit – October 1, 2012  
Jess Traver P.E., Director of Government Affairs  
The Builders Association of Northern Nevada

In the last decade we all have seen many disastrous fires in the Northern Nevada area. The Fire Service also answered the threats with incredible efficacy... BUT

The community is too reliant on their fire departments; they assume that the fire department will be there to save them, but fire conditions and increasing populations can make this challenging.

Historically, Fire Departments responded by “protecting” communities with firefighters and equipment.

Current Situation... The fire services have a dilemma ... the capital improvement program which is used to plan and fund stations could be in jeopardy because of the economic downturn.

Another Situation... The Reno area has passed the point of affordability of new homes and increasing taxes, so the building of more stations and providing more staff could be questionable.

The bottom-line... can we afford fire protection as we have done in the past?

Solution... We need to work as a community team to bring economic stability to our valley. That means identifying broad based ideas involving all sectors of the business community including fire protection.

The emphasis must include passive ways to protect communities and “prepare” communities for a wildfire.

In the last decade we all have seen many disastrous fires in the Northern Nevada area.

Could we have prevented them? Perhaps not, but we could minimize their effect.

Ed Smith's overviewed included a few disturbing predictions:

- Fire seasons will become longer, more intense and wildfires will be more difficult to control.
- The number of people living in or adjacent to high fire hazard areas will increase.
- Our firefighting resources will not keep pace with the increased wildfire threat.

If we as a community do not prepare for this future we are turning our back on economic, environmental and community costs.

What is the role of the building industry in this community effort??

The builder, engineer and architect are the first contacts with homeowners in designing, building or selling new homes.

We build streets and highways to access to developments.

We provide the infrastructure to service the developments.

As developers we purchase and subdivide land for a beneficial use.

Planning the communities to interface with the wild land is now becoming a focus and will be a key to selling homes.

The 2012 Wildland Interface Code will provide the builder with more guidance in meeting the objectives of the fire service.

However, the problem with mandating through codes is that it normally introduces a minimum effort to meet code compliance and sometimes reduces efforts toward flexibility and problem solving through creative assessment.

The fire service needs to create a team approach toward planning communities which will balance the fundamental objectives with the cost barriers.

Because the builder is the first contact with the homeowner it seems like the community team needs to make sure the message the builder delivers includes assurance and clarity.

If the builder can sell the home with the assurance that the fire department has worked with them to layout the best possible defensible space then the new owner of the property will recognize the importance of maintaining the defensible space.

1. The builder can also market that the landscaping as an enhanced design to reduce ladder effects and reduce the potential of large fires...
2. The builder can also advertise that an evacuation plan has been implemented with the fire service and the project has been designed for response and evacuation...
3. The builder can advertise the use of planned material types in the construction of the home...
4. The builder can advertise that the community team has worked together to address the threat...

I believe the fire service can provide a safer development and allow the builder and developer to maximize their investment.

The fire protection plan must enjoy the input and support of the builder.

This outreach to the builders must be accomplished sooner than later.

The Builders Association of Northern Nevada “Builders Council” and their numerous subcontractor and trade committees are always willing to provide the training to accomplish the fire service requests.

The Builders Association of Northern Nevada was very successful in outreach efforts for the Nevada office of Energy in promoting the 2009 Energy Code adoption throughout the State. The Builders Association of Northern Nevada actually sponsored 42 seminars and many outreach meetings to make sure the Building Officials and contractors were prepared for the adoption.

**The builders must be included in the community team to develop this wild land interface plan.**