

Playing It Safe...

IN OUR 2004 Voting Member Survey, 25% of us expressed some concern about fire safety. Seeing the growing height of the scrub oak in our area and watching the California brush fires on TV, many of us have quite reasonably asked...How safe are we? And what can we do to be even safer?

Thankfully, we've never had a wildfire in Tom Nevers. There have been a few house fires, but those were largely confined to the premises. So our challenge is to prevent fires from starting in the first place...and if they do start, to prevent them from spreading.

The Nantucket Fire Department's logs tell us that most of the emergency calls to our area are as the result of...chimney sparks igniting roofs...the improper disposal of fireplace or grill embers...and fires caused by fireworks.

All roofing materials should be fire resistant, and gutters and eaves should be kept free of debris. Fireplace and woodstove chimneys should be cleaned regularly. (Woodstoves also require a permit and NFD installation inspection. Without them, your insurance company may deny claims!) And be careful with the placement of any space heaters.

The improper disposal of fireplace and grill embers is also a big cause of house fires. Let embers sit for at least 24-hours before disposal. They may seem cool, but don't put them in a plastic trashcan on your deck or near your house. That's asking for trouble. (Open-flame grills also require a permit from the NFD and should never be used on 2nd floor wooden decks.)

Fireworks can be a real fire threat in our area. They're illegal. But beyond that, shooting them off in a heavily brush-covered area like ours is just plain reckless. Be sure to warn renters.

What about the threat of runaway brush fires? The fire department is particularly concerned about places like

ours, with so many houses surrounded by brush. It's a combustion source and it eliminates the usual "firebreaks" that can stop a fire's spread. It also restricts fire equipment from reaching all sides of a burning structure. A cleared space of 30-feet or more around your house and out-buildings is recommended.

As part of a plan to improve fire safety, you might want to clear away at least some of the taller brush around your home. You can hire someone...or rent brush cutters, chippers, chain saws, stump removers, etc. here on the island. Homeowners can dispose of brush without cost at the landfill.