



Oak Hill Area  
**FIRE SAFE  
COUNCIL**

# January 2023 Newsletter



**FIREWISE USA**  
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

*Dear Neighbors,*

**Welcome to 2023!** We wish all in the Oak Hill Area Fire Safe Council\* a safe and healthy New Year. Council volunteers are working hard to find ways to make our community more fire-safe, and our presenting these 2 events:

## 1. OHAFSC Greenwaste Dumpster Day

**Feb 11, 9AM- 4PM** (or until its filled)

**Free disposal of green waste (no trash)**

Dispose of slash after your winter defensible space work!

**Location: Oak Hill Fire Station, 1834 Pleasant Valley Rd**

## 2. OHAFSC Community Day Event

**March 25, 11 AM to 2 PM** (rain date Apr 1)

Our second annual get-together- free hot dogs and music, helpful info, kids games, prizes! **Location: Back yard, Oak Hill Fire Station, Pleasant Valley Rd**

**\*Who's in the Oak Hill Area Fire Safe Council?** All residents who live on, or on roads which feed into, Pleasant Valley Rd between Big Cut and Cedar Ravine. This includes all feeder roads like Zandonella, Oak Hill, Hanks Exchange, and all their "tributaries".

# The Details:

## 1. OHA-FSC Greenwaste Dumpster Day- Feb 11 9-4 (or until its full)

**Where: Front of Oak Hill Fire Station, 1834 Pleasant Valley Rd.**

Your fire safe council is providing a FREE 30 yard green waste dumpster for use by area residents. This is a great opportunity to improve your defensible space again after all the storms! ONLY green waste may be added, but there is no limit to how many loads you can bring, until dumpster is full. Do keep track of your time spent reducing that fuel, to try for a prize at our Community Day in March! (See next page). Defensible space advice from your FSC is [here](#).

***“What if I can’t make the Feb 11 date?”***

**Use the free chipping program,** **Twice a year** is allowed now. A contractor will come to your property and chip your materials for up to 6 hours for free, leaving the chips where you designate. [Read details](#) before doing the work to make sure you prepare piles correctly.

**Or instead of chipping, make small, well-spaced piles,** far (>100 ft) from your house, where they can slowly decompose and provide wildlife habitat.

**Time for  
property  
maintenance!**

**Take advantage of winter days  
when warm and dry, with  
lowered fire risk, and fewer  
bird nests.**



## 2. OHAFCSC Community Day- Mar 25 11-2PM

**Where: Back yard of Oak Hill Fire Station, 1834 Pleasant Valley Rd.**

The event is **free** to residents of the Oak Hill Area Fire Safe Council, though donations are welcome. Funds donated will help us improve Council offerings.

Kids games!

Activities  
and info!

Free  
Hot dog  
social!



Music DJ!

All outdoors +  
well-spaced:

### **Get rewarded for fire prevention**

Keep track of your hours and/or money spent since January 1, 2023 doing defensible space and/or home hardening. Add it to our banner at the event and you will be entered to win a **prize** - two awarded randomly, and two awarded to highest achievers! (For keeping track, your best estimate of hours and/or \$ spent for

Jan. thru Mar. in 2023 is all we'll need) Even spending one hour between now and Mar. 25 on clearing fallen branches will make you eligible for the prize drawing. Get ready to add your name to our roll of "Ember Heroes"!



**Parking:** both in front of, and through the gate and behind, the fire station, but it may be tight. Please, no RVs. Volunteer parking attendants will be on hand.

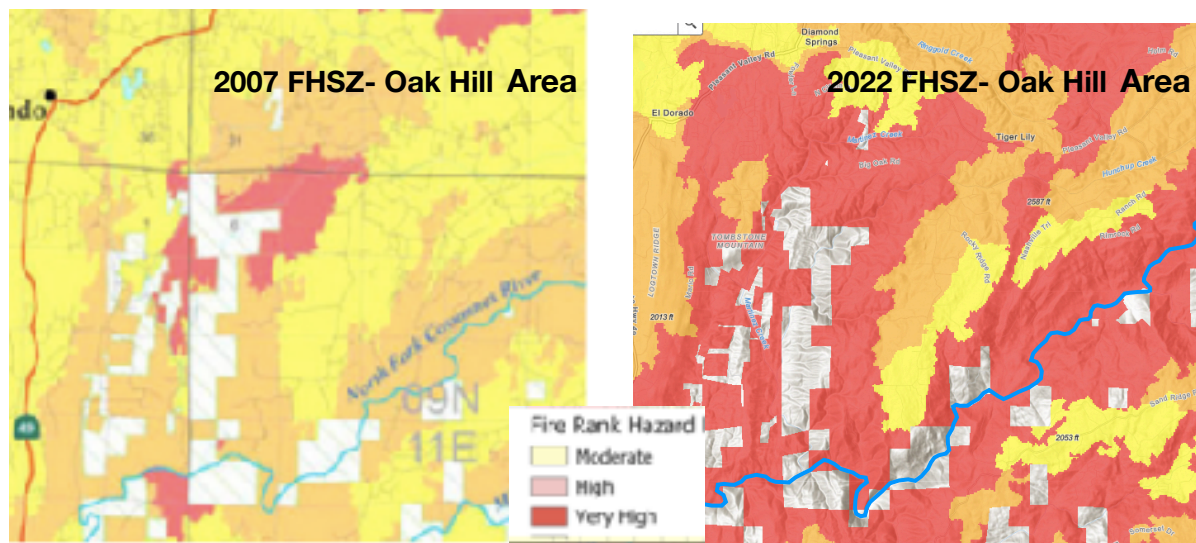


**Volunteer** The more volunteers, the more successful the event. Let organizer Alice Cantelow know if you'd like to [help](#)! Thank you!!

# Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map (FHSZ) - Oak Hill and surrounding area

In the county-wide “Foothill Fire Flash” that we emailed you last week, CAL FIRE’s new updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) Map for the state was discussed and shown for El Dorado County. ( info on new maps is [here](#).)

And in our specific area? In general, there is much less of the “moderate” (the lowest hazard zone), and more of the higher two zones. (In maps below, Pleasant Valley Rd is near the top, Oak Hill Rd runs roughly down the middle, with Hwy 49 on far left, and not quite to Bucks Bar Rd. on the far right).



You can enter your own address to see your specific hazard zone [here](#). The main reason these updated FHSZ maps are so different is that modeling has greatly improved, as has an understanding of things like ember cast. According to a recent CAL FIRE presentation, any FHSZ change is not expected to affect your insurance, since those companies use their own maps. These maps do remind us of just how important defensible space and home hardening are!

# So, have you considered masticating?

As many of us work to reduce the hazardous vegetation around our homes and property, we often hear of others that have had their property “masticated”. What exactly is that and what are the “pros” and “cons”?

Mastication, or “forest mulching”, is a mechanical treatment that “rearranges” the vegetation by chopping and shredding it into smaller pieces and spreading it out over the ground. This treatment changes how forest vegetation burns during a wildfire. Instead of having dense masses of tall shrubs or young trees with their canopy touching, you “chew” them up and spread them out.

While you are not reducing the amount of biomass, you are getting it more densely packed and lower to the ground. This reduces the wildfire flame length when it burns through your property, though in the short term, it can cause a ground fire to burn very hot. Shorter flame lengths are easier to put out than tall flame lengths and pose less of a risk of turning into a crown fire.

## Types of equipment

There are several different types of masticators, so if you are going to hire someone, you will want to know the differences. In fact, the term “masticator” refers to the head on the machine, not the actual machine that drives around in the woods. The most common one used on private property is a horizontal drum masticator. Less common are disk or rotary masticators (this is what is often used along highways). The masticator can be attached at the front end of a tractor or skidder, or can be on a boom, such as an excavator.



From left to right: drum mastication head, rotary disk masticator, and a mini excavator with a masticator head. Attaching rubber covers on the tracks can reduce soil damage.



Disc masticators can typically cut through thicker trees more quickly, can be faster than drum masticators, but tend to grind the vegetation into larger chunks. Drum masticators are more efficient in smaller trees and brush, and produce a much finer mulch.

And then the type of equipment that the masticator is attached to is important. Excavators (boom-mounted equipment) can reach taller trees, avoid traveling on steeper slopes and at times reach around trees to be saved. Wheeled equipment tends to carry a wider masticator, so can treat a larger area more quickly. But then, the spacing of the trees you want to leave may be a factor.

Mastication, like all defensible space work, is not a “one and done”. It requires ongoing maintenance to be effective.

### **Resulting Landscape**



Property in Big Oak Rd. area (off Oak Hill), masticated last Fall to improve wildfire safety.

Mastication disturbs a lot more vegetation than cutting by hand, and in the short-term, leaves behind a highly disturbed appearance. Typically, you will see shredded wood chunks any place the masticator has treated. However, this highly disturbed look does not last very long!

By the following June, the evidence of this destruction will fade away. First, the “white” pieces of freshly cut wood will turn a grayish color due to the natural weathering process and blend in with all the other woody debris on the forest floor. Then needles and leaves from the remaining trees and shrubs will fall, covering some of the debris and disturbed soil. Finally, new plant growth will flourish and hide much of the masticated material.

Unfortunately, you do have to be **very** careful that invasive plants, which tend to be highly flammable, don't fill in the newly opened area. Some people follow mastication with controlled burns for this reason. Info about the new county Prescribed Burn Association is [here](#).

### **Size of debris left**

What will the chunks left on the ground look like? This can be influenced by the operator and their rate of travel over the forest floor; the slower they go, the smaller the pieces will be.



Photo: Chris Schnepf,

Large woody debris like this, from fast mastication, provides habitat for insects and small mammals, while building soil over a longer period.

Material masticated can also be chipped, as this was near Big Oak Rd, leaving smaller chunks. They will add organics to soil more quickly, but do not provide as much habitat.



To watch a masticator in action and learn more about the process and benefits, check out the videos below, and the Forest Service publication “To Masticate or Not.”

### [Forestry Mulching 101 – CELM Bigfork Montana](#)

### [Bobcat Forestry Cutter Attachment – Bobcat Manufacturing](#)

### [Mastication Treatments in Southwestern Forests – Southwest Fire Science Consortium](#)

### [To Masticate or Not – U.S. Forest Service Publication](#)

Article modified from: Forest Stewardship Notes, <https://foreststewardshipnotes.wordpress.com/2020/06/05/wildfire-corner-benefits-of-forest-mastication/>

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#### *Free Home assessments*

are still available. These are informal visits to give specific ideas on creating better fire resilience- thru both defensible space and home hardening. Request a home visit at [info@oakhillfiresafe.org](mailto:info@oakhillfiresafe.org) Two knowledgeable fire safe council volunteers will come evaluate your home and property with you at no cost.

#### [Sign up](#) for new county alert system- RAVE.

Even if you “automatically” migrated over from the old county alert system, it is suggested that you sign up again. Why? During the Mosquito Fire some residents found that the migration had not actually worked, and they did not get timely notification of the fire in their area. This seems to have been particularly true if they had signed up originally via their phone. Make sure you’re on the [new emergency system](#):



Let's all keep working together to make our community fire safe!

Sincerely,

*The Oak Hill Area Fire Safe Council Team*

[info@oakhillfiresafe.org](mailto:info@oakhillfiresafe.org)

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