



A Burning Desire

Vail Board of REALTORS® Launches a Wildfire Mitigation Program

As I write this story, northern California is in a state of crisis. One hundred miles west of Sacramento, thousands of people are losing their homes to the Valley Fire. The power and fury of this blaze is akin to the Black Forest Fire that occurred in 2013, south of Colorado Springs. The devastation at this point in California is parallel but could easily surpass Colorado's most destructive fire on record. It is both humbling and horrifying. The lives lost, the properties destroyed, the communities are rocked to the core. It's a natural disaster and it may seem that we have no recourse. Not so, we do not have to be sitting ducks.

Now is the time to advocate for our community—at the Vail Board of REALTORS®, we love this community for more than our livelihood. This is our home too. We raise our families here. We have put down roots. And, in the spirit of servant leadership, it is our duty to help preserve it. We are taking action.

In October, the Vail Board of REALTORS® launches REALFire, a wildfire awareness program in Eagle County. This local education and outreach program is planned to evolve into a countywide voluntary property assessment recognition program. Initiated by REALTORS® for home buyers and home sellers, we are collaborating with local fire protection districts and with Eagle County to bring wildfire mitigation to the forefront. This program complements the already outstanding efforts of our local fire districts and county staff. Don't wait until fire threatens your home to look at your property and notice the combustible fuel surrounding you.

From outreach to action

Education is a process. For REALFire, it starts with the core educators, our team of real estate professionals working in collaboration with the wildfire professionals of the local fire districts and Eagle County. Our strategy is simple yet effective; REALTORS® are in a unique position to consistently deliver the message of wildfire mitigation to homeowners. Mike Budd, Chair of the Board's Government Affairs Committee, has been involved with this issue since the beginning. "We embarked on the program as a voluntary option in response to state recommendations that called for a statewide regulatory approach to development. We believe what we're doing now through education and the future development of a voluntary assessment program is a better solution for our unique local context."

In Budd's astute opinion, "REALTORS® offer a conduit for their clients to learn about fire remediation and how it benefits homeowners from insurance and property values now and into the future. We aren't experts in fire prevention but in collaboration with key fire protection stakeholders, we can be an agent of change."

Budd has a very pragmatic approach. He sees the high possibility of impending state government policy as a potential problem in real estate transactions that we must prepare for. Budd relays, “Imposing mandatory requirements by a state agency could have the potential of stigmatizing properties and putting owners into major remediation costs prior to transfer of title on their properties.”

Budd further explained, “This became an opportunity for Vail REALTORS® to proactively engage with other stakeholders in the community; to create a voluntary mitigation program that can negate the need for state mandated requirements through local action.”

Setting a statewide precedent

Eagle County is not the first to take action. Boulder County has a similar program, called Wildfire Partners that has been met with great success. Molly Mowery, President and Owner of Wildfire Planning International, has been working with both counties’ and has unique insights the two programs.

“When it comes to wildfire, everyone has a vested interest in community safety,” says Mowery. “The REALFire program provides an additional avenue for REALTORS® and residents to access reliable information on wildfire risk reduction. Ultimately, the more prepared the Vail Valley is for wildfire, the more the community is able to withstand the impacts.”

The Vail Board of REALTORS® has created printed and electronic guides for REALTORS® and property owners to learn more. Resources include a Home Buyer Reference Guide, and a Home Seller Reference Guide. There is also a Wildfire Reference Guide for REALTORS® to assist their clients with understanding the importance of wildfire mitigation. We encourage you to ask your broker about these pieces. These guides were created to empower residents to take action with their properties. These resources will also be available on VBR.net as of October 1st. Additionally, we hope this initiative inspires other REALTOR® boards to engage with their communities and the movement spreads statewide.

Mowery’s expertise spans from the U.S. to the U.K. and Canada. She developed and managed the Fire Adapted Communities program for the National Fire Protection Association, in coordination with the USDA Forest Service. Mowery praises the Vail Board of REALTORS® for setting a national precedent, “I have been working with communities across the U.S. for almost 10 years on wildfire mitigation topics and this is the first experience I’ve had where REALTORS® are taking the *lead* in initiating conversations to help board members understand their role in educating residents on wildfire safety and, work alongside community stakeholders to support wildfire preparedness. I’m excited to see this become a national example for others in the industry.”

Visit **VBR.net** for additional information about the REALFire program, and after October 1st, to access our newly released reference guides.