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Sedgwick Volunteer Fire Department Receives Firewise USA® Recognition

SEDGWICK, AR – Sedgwick firefighters have worked to complete a large-scale wildfire prevention effort across their fire district with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Forestry Division and Firewise USA®. As part of recognition requirements, Sedgwick crew members completed wildfire safety assessment surveys on structures in their fire district and developed a Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan, which outlines wildfire mitigation projects and concerns in the next three-year window (residents may request a copy).

“The Sedgwick Fire District is at risk for wildfire,” said Arkansas Firewise Coordinator, Travis Haile. “With the type of terrain and overgrowth, fires can spread quickly. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is proud this fire department is so willing to make wildfire prevention a part of local concerns.”

The primary mission of the Firewise USA® initiative is to improve a community’s defensible space, or the area closest to homes (up to 300 feet from structures) that should be treated for wildfire-resistance. Sedgwick crew members are also looking to educate community members on Firewise USA® goals and principles, distributing fire safety information at various events. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture encourages citizens to be informed and to get involved in local fire prevention efforts.

So, what are the primary wildfire concerns for residents in the Sedgwick Fire District and Lawrence County– and very importantly, what can homeowners do to help firefighters make homes safer?

- **Spacing between Vegetation and Homes:** The area up to 300 feet from homes should contain lean, clean, and green vegetation of all kinds – this includes landscaping, grass, trees, and shrubbery. Homeowners primary focus should be directed to the Immediate Zone (0-5 feet from the home). Keep grass mowed short and provide water, making it very resistant to fire embers. Trim trees so limbs do not touch the roof, windows, or deck areas; also work to keep limbs trimmed at least six feet up from the ground so that a small surface fire is not transferred to treetops. Finally, keep dead vegetation like leaves, twigs, and pine needles cleared from the roof, porches, vents, and structure walls. These dead plant materials spread flames between vegetation and homes.
- **Think of the yard as the primary defense against wildfire:** Any debris, trees, vehicles, fences, workshops, doghouses, RVs, barns, or otherwise that could carry wildfire from the surrounding wildland area to your home should be considered a hazard. Any cleared area that could be used to stop a fire is helpful.
- **Be mindful of burn bans and high fire weather:** Though it’s not always convenient for homeowners during burn bans, they are declared by county judges when conditions are too dangerous to burn. Firefighters encourage residents to stay informed about burn bans via radio announcements, television, or by visiting arkfireinfo.org for an up-to-date statewide map of burn bans. Additionally, it’s important to remember that even without burn bans, when winds are high and humidity is low, burning is still very dangerous. Don’t leave trash, leaves, or brush unattended while burning at anytime, but especially when the weather is ripe for high wildfire danger.
- **Mailbox Lettering:** It’s easy enough for firefighters to find a home when smoke is billowing from all sides, however, it becomes very difficult to locate emergencies and possible victims in the middle of

the night or during rain when nature has no way of pinpointing a scene. While everyone understands posting reflective letters may take some time, firefighters encourage everyone to get correct addresses posted in four-inch letters as soon as possible to allow for the quickest possible response time.

The leading causes of wildfire in Arkansas are burning debris and arson. Debris fires include a broad list of accidents related to trash, brush pile, and leaf burns, while arson fires are those lit intentionally. Homeowners often light fires when conditions are too windy, during burn bans, or in areas that are not appropriately separated from the surrounding wildland area. Firefighters hope homeowners begin to make informed decisions about using fire and encourage residents to call any time they hope to burn so that should a situation change, fire trucks can arrive quickly.

Many times homeowners take for granted that a fire department could save every home from fire; this is not a reality. What is a reality, however, is that residents can take active steps to ensure that their home could be saved in the event of a wildfire by keeping defensible space maintained and accessible to fire crews and water. The Sedgwick community has dedicated fire teams protecting their families and structures.

The Sedgwick Fire Department and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture hope to support you in all efforts to reduce wildfire risk. Call 501-813-2554 for more information about Firewise®, or visit the website at www.aad.arkansas.gov/arkansas-firewise1. Remember to call 911 to report wildfires or emergencies in your area.

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Residents reducing wildfire risks