

# 2015 Firewise Recertification Document

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On Line Form

## **Description of Sun City Texas**

Sun City Texas, a Pulte/Del Webb development, is located within the city of Georgetown, Texas, 5.5 miles from Interstate 35 on Williams Drive. Sun City Texas is an urban community with wildland vegetation (juniper, hardwood, and native grasses) in the parks, open spaces and adjacent properties. Originally, Sun City Texas was to have 7,500 homes on 4,100 acres of which approximately 800 acres are common area. The Developer has expanded Sun City Texas to approximately 10,000 houses on about 5,000 acres.

As of November 1, 2015, there are 7,125 homes with a Sun City Texas population of 13,181 residents. Sun City Texas is presently the largest Home Owners Association recognized as a Firewise Community in Texas. The community is divided into 66 Neighborhoods each with their own organization.

The Sun City Texas Community Association (CA) is responsible for the management of all non-residential property. CA documents define a set of four maintenance levels. Included in these levels are federally defined protection areas for karst formations (including underground caves) for endangered species. The CA also owns and maintains three golf courses.

There are two creeks, Berry and Cowan, which have hardwood and Ashe juniper (cedar) trees in the flood plain. The presence of Ashe juniper (cedar) trees, an invasive native, posed a fire hazard from the trees themselves and acted as an accumulation point for debris during periods of creek floods. Since the 2010 flooding event approximately 8.5 miles of flood plain have been cleared. An additional 240 acres of common area have been cleared.

Ashe juniper and other invasive species are fire hazards in many of the common areas. Shaded fuel breaks have been established in two heavy concentrations that posed a significant wildfire threat. Additional areas are being managed to remove Ashe juniper and other invasive species.

Sun City Texas has 720 Landscaped Maintained Homes (LMH) managed by the CA. The lawns, beds, and trees are maintained under a vendor contract with the CA. The CA Staff and the Landscaped Maintained Homes Committee apply the Firewise Home Ignition Zone principles to LMH properties.

All other residential properties depend on individual property owners for the implementation of the Home Ignition Zone principles. Homeowner education is the key to providing information to community residents concerning the dangers from wildfires and to encourage the management of defensible spaces around their homes. When requested, Home Ignition Zone Evaluations (HIZE) are available through approximately 40 trained evaluators.

The Sun City Texas Firewise Group is a subcommittee of the Sun City Texas Emergency Management Committee.

The Firewise Group assigns specific tasks to the following program groups:

Education Work Group

Home Ignition Zone Evaluation Work Group

Community Wildfire Protection and Re-certification Process Program Work Group

Firewise Clearing Crew

The Firewise Group hosts an annual community-wide Firewise Town Hall and an informational display is used at the quarterly New Residents Orientation Town Hall. Presentations are also made at community events such as special town halls, Neighborhood events, and club meetings. Since Sun City Texas is divided into Neighborhoods, participation in Neighborhood meetings provides the Firewise Group with opportunities for face-to-face contact with the residents. The monthly CA magazine *Sun Rays*, the weekly CA Communicator e-mails, and special e-mails are used to communicate additional information about Firewise and about high fire danger situations when they occur.

The Firewise Group maintains a trained core team of about 40 volunteer Home Ignition Zone Evaluators to conduct Home Ignition Zone Evaluations. These individuals not only conduct evaluations as requested by residents but also become Neighborhood sources for Firewise information.

The Firewise Group works with the CA Staff, the Property and Grounds Committee, the Wildlife Management Committee, the Modifications Committee, and the Golf Committee to reduce the potential for wildfires in the CA-owned common areas. The volunteer Firewise Clearing Crew meets weekly (weather and Staff availability permitting). Working with the CA Landscaping staff, the Firewise Clearing Crew removes small Ashe junipers and vines in common areas that could become ladder fuels in a wildfire.

## **Partner Groups**

### *Texas A&M Forest Service*

This has been an excellent year working with the Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS). In January, two Sun City Texas volunteers attended the TFS Firewise Workshop in Schertz, Texas. Will Boettner, Wildland Urban Interface Specialist presented a part of the annual Firewise Town Hall.

### *Georgetown Fire Department*

The Firewise Group partnered with the Georgetown Fire Department (GFD) in the Wildfire Preparedness Day in May and the annual Firewise Community Town Hall during National Fire Prevention Week in October. The GFD Wildland Fire Crew participated helping remove dead trees and limbs. GFD presented a session on smoke and carbon monoxide detectors at the October Town Hall.

Georgetown Fire Department recognized Dan Dodson and Paul Ohlenbusch with certificates reading: 'Recognized for your selfless dedication to improving wildfire prevention and preparedness within the Sun City Texas community and Georgetown. Your wildfire preparedness program is a model for others to follow and is being recognized at the National Wildland Education Conference.'

## **Sun City Texas Community Association Advisory Committees**

### *Property and Grounds Committee (P&G)*

The Firewise Group continues to work with P&G. We provided an annual review of progress and proposed activities and provide advice on the management of common areas. P&G provides a liaison to the Firewise Group.

### *Wildlife Management Committee (WMC)*

The Firewise Group continues to work with WMC to improve wildlife habitat while meeting the goal of reducing the wildfire potential. Removing the Ashe juniper has changed the habits of the deer and turkey populations. Deer are now using the creeks and golf courses as travel ways to neighborhoods and to eat landscape materials. The turkey population has increased, possibly due to removing Ashe juniper which provides access to trees as roosting habitat. Also, the turkeys use the yards of many residences as food sources. WMC provides a liaison to the Firewise Group.

### *Sun City Texas Staff*

The Firewise Group works with the CA Landscaping Staff by advising on routine maintenance situations where a potential wildfire hazard exists. Participation in the walking punch list tours of new neighborhoods prior to the developer turning over the common areas to the CA is important. This process insures the developer has mitigated any wildfire hazards and removed any debris resulting from construction.

The Firewise Group also works with the CA Water Management Staff by advising on the clearing and maintenance of all native common areas. Meetings with interested residents, staff, and Firewise are often held in the work area to provide the rationale for the work. Involvement of the residents allows their input into the process. Modifications to maintain privacy desires and similar requests can then be planned before the work begins.

### **2015 Accomplishments**

Table 1 contains the volunteer time and Community Association contributions for the calendar year.

Projects were identified by Firewise leaders who have many years of experience in land management and the fire service. During the first half of the year, the Firewise Volunteer Clearing Crew, supported by the CA staff, assembled weekly to remove small Ashe junipers and ladder fuel in the common areas. To date, the Firewise Volunteer Clearing Crew and CA Staff and equipment have reduced the fire threat on approximately 240 acres.

Sun City Texas Firewise and Firewise USA publications continue to be distributed in the Welcome Packets given to each new resident. The publications are also available at all Firewise presentations and events. Firewise information is also presented in the Sun City Texas Resource Guide (directory) which is distributed to all residents.

Fourteen groups, staff, or notices mentioned Firewise in articles published in the monthly *Sun Rays* resident magazine. Additional information items about Firewise and fire dangers were produced for the weekly CA Communicator e-mails.

The Firewise USA publication "How to Have a Firewise Home" continues to be distributed in many venues.

### **Wildfire Preparedness Day**

Wildfire Preparedness Day was held on May 2 with 36 volunteers, 8 Staff members and 4 members of the GFD Wildland Crew. A 5 acre common area that had Ashe juniper removed 3 years earlier was targeted. The volunteers, using hand tools only, cleared the area. The CA Staff prepared brats and hot dogs, chips, and drinks for

**Table 1.** The 2015 hours and costs contributed by volunteers, homeowners, and CA.

Sun City Texas Data

Rooftops	7,125 rooftops		
Residents	13,181 residents		
<u>item</u>	<u>number</u>	<u>units</u>	<u>value</u> <u>total</u>
<b>Volunteers</b>			
Firewise volunteers	1,487	hours	34,305
Home Ignition Zone Evaluations	84	hours	1,938
Volunteer Clearing Crew	48	hours	1,107
Subtotal-Volunteer Contribution	1,619	hours	\$37,350
Landscape Maintained Homes (726 houses) <sup>1</sup>			\$149,760
<b>Sun City Texas Community Association</b>			
Creek Clearing Crew <sup>1</sup>			62,000
Staff Work <sup>1</sup>			13,346
Contractor Work <sup>1</sup>			20,000
Subtotal-Community Association Contribution			\$95,346
<b>Resident Contribution (prorated) for House and Yard Maintenance</b>			
Paid to vendor			1,565,125
Own care			3,342,266
Subtotal-Resident Contribution			\$4,907,391
Total contribution			\$5,189,847

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<sup>1</sup> Values represent amount spent for Firewise remediation only.

lunch. Additional funding was received from Bartlett Tree Experts, TCB Landscaping, and Valley Crest Landscaping. Bartlett Tree Experts also provided 100 tree seedlings for residents as part of their nation-wide program. The support of the vendors is greatly appreciated. See Appendix A.

## **NFPA's "Backyard & Beyond" Conference**

Sun City Texas Firewise presented a session entitled *Tailoring the Firewise Concepts to Your Community* at the 2015 Backyards & Beyond Conference, October 22-24, 2015, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

## **Firewise Town Hall**

The Annual Firewise Town Hall was held October 6 with Texas A&M Forest Service, Wildlife Management Committee, and Georgetown Fire Department participating. Attendance was low with about 60 people plus the TV live audience over local Channel 18.

## **Media Coverage**

The Georgetown edition of the Community Impact Newspaper included a front page article with information about the Sun City Texas Firewise Program and the Williamson County Emergency Management Coordinator. It stressed the county's goal of encouraging county residents as the county compiles a preparedness survey to help tackle various natural disasters in a new plan.

The Firewise Trumpet newsletter is published monthly. It is distributed to community leaders, Firewise volunteers, and Neighborhoods. See Appendix B.

The CA Communications Department publishes a monthly magazine *Sun Rays* distributed to all residents. Information about the Sun City Texas Firewise program was included in 6 of the 12 editions this year. The Communications Department also designed and produced a 4x6 inch information card given to residents to encourage participation in the Home Ignition Zone Evaluation program. See Appendix C.

## **New Residents Orientation Town Hall**

The Sun City Texas Community Association conducts a quarterly New Residents Orientation to acquaint the newcomers to the many activities offered in Sun City Texas. The Firewise Group participates in activities held at the orientation providing information about wildfires and the hazards that a resident might experience. Residents are given information about using appropriate landscape plants and continued landscape maintenance to reduce hazards. They are also given the opportunity to request a free Home Ignition Zone Evaluation on their home.

## **Training Program**

### *Home Ignition Zone Evaluation*

The Firewise Group held two training sessions. The April 15 session included 4 new evaluators and 4 evaluators for continuing education. The October 29 session included 2 new evaluators and 10 evaluators for continuing education. These sessions are available to outside groups and agencies.

### *Landscape Companies Training*

The Firewise Group held the annual landscape training session on January 30. The session included 12 companies with 14 individuals. Companies are now required to have continuing education every three years. Currently there are 19 companies who have met the requirements and are listed in the Vendor Notebooks for residents and on the Firewise web site.



## **Texas A&M Forest Service Firewise Workshop**

Sun City TexasFirewise participated in a training session in Schertz, Texas co-hosted by TFS and NFPA Firewise.

### **2016 Plans**

- Conduct a landscape company training event on January 29.
- Distribute Firewise information to residents.
- Hold a Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, May 6.
- Conduct the Firewise Town Hall on October 4.
- Continue training for the Home Ignition Zone Evaluation Program with sessions on April 28 and October 27.
- Provide Firewise information at Neighborhood, club, and community-wide gatherings.
- Continue working with the CA Property and Grounds, Wildlife Management, Golf, and Modifications Committees integrating Firewise practices into the community.
- Work to promote National Fire Prevention Week with Georgetown Fire Department.
- Develop recertification materials for 2016.

## **Appendix A**

**May 2, 2015 Wildfire Preparedness Day**

**Appendix B**

**2015 Firewise Trumpet**

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