

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting of April 13, 2022

To: Board of Directors

From: Kathleen Cutter, Defensible Space Lead II

Subject: Receive Presentation on Fuel Projects and Defensible Space Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board receives the Presentation on the Defensible Space Program that will provide an update on the program and the number of inspections throughout the greater Ross Valley area for the JPA member agencies.

BACKGROUND:

The Fire Agencies of Central Marin Fire Department, Kentfield Fire Protection District, Ross Valley Fire Department, and Marin County Fire Department are working together to provide defensible space inspections for the Greater Ross Valley Area and West Marin.

The areas of inspection are based on our Evacuation Maps and every inspection result in a comprehensive report for the property owner that can be accessed online by the owner using a unique code given to them or left at their door by the inspectors. Additionally, throughout the inspection, residents are encouraged to accompany the inspectors. And although our inspectors do not access properties without permission of the tenant or owner. If no one is home or access is denied, the inspector inspects from the street obeying laws of curtilage.

Approximately four days to one week before our inspectors start inspecting a neighborhood, we notify the community through “press releases” pushed through the RVFD social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Nextdoor, and website), the local Firewise sites, and Town newsletters/notifications. While inspecting, our Inspectors place sandwich boards with the message “Wildfire Mitigation Defensible Space Inspectors in Your Neighborhood” at highly visible--and safe--locations in the area being inspected.

During the 2021 inspection season, the Defensible Space Inspectors completed 15,321 inspections from May through October. In the past we shared how many of these properties were either “compliant” or “non-compliant,” however, it was misleading. One tends to think that “compliant houses” are safe and that “non-compliant houses” are unsafe. Technically, a house is “out of compliance” if it has some leaf litter against a structure. A house with a 150ft fence attached to

their wood shingled house “is compliant.” In short, whether a home is well prepared to withstand a wildfire cannot be told by this designation.

The data we have from the Defensible Space Inspector software helps us to determine what the hazards are, where they are located, and help point to possible mitigation efforts and to identify needs.

DISCUSSION:

As we prepared for the 2022 Defensible Space inspections, we onboarded 25 seasonal defensible inspectors, five of whom served as Defensible Space Inspectors last year. In addition, Jason Nancarrow and Tate Thompson, are the newly hired Defensible Space Inspector Lead I’s, and they will assist the Defensible Space Inspector Lead II, Kathleen Cutter, in the program’s day to day operations to ensure consistent, comprehensive, and high-quality inspections emphasizing great customer service. Further, our goal is to complete 15,000 inspections with a greater portion of these inspections being secondary, or re-inspections from last year. While the MWPA requires us to inspect every property under our responsibility once every three years, we are on track to inspect every property every two years.

The advent of this season finds our resident report messaging much improved. Last year’s inspections have this improved messaging now, yet the findings of last year’s report are the same. In other words, if a resident opens their report from last year, they will still see the same items identified in their year-old inspection but they will notice a clearer description of the finding, clearly stated action steps (if) required, and notification of MWPA or other grants if applicable. The resident will also see the dates of their MWPA free chipper day. Another point of interest is that our Defensible Space software reporting application is being adopted by all the other Marin Defensible Space Programs as well as agencies outside Marin this season. We are proud to have worked with the software developers to make this software an unparalleled reporting tool.

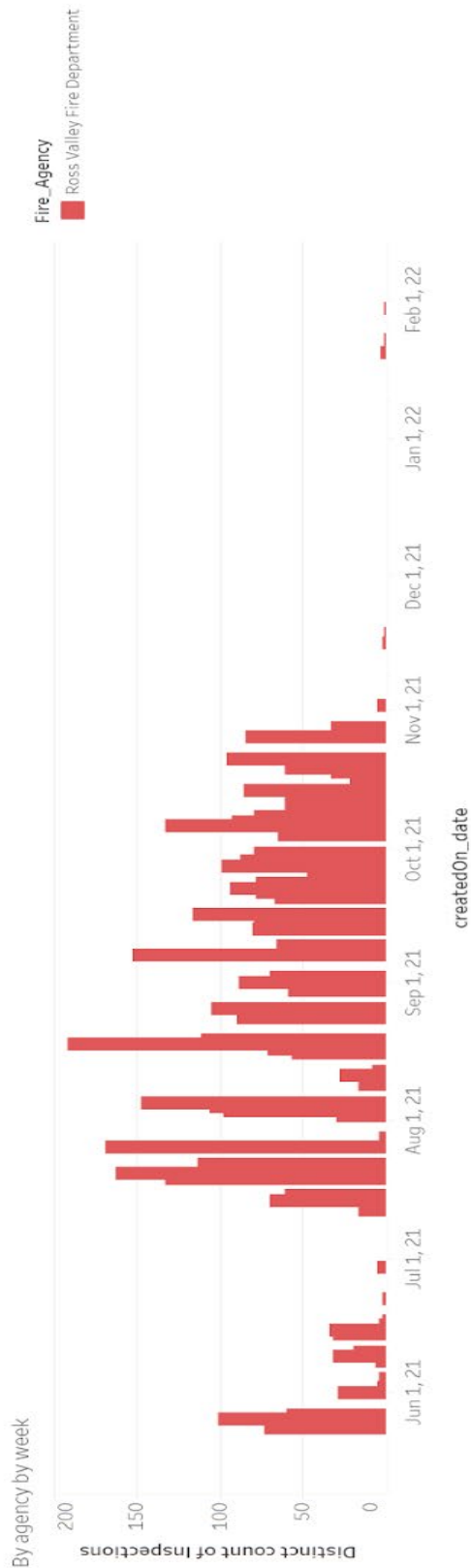
Currently, our newly hired inspectors are undergoing a rigorous two-week academy to train them to become highly qualified Defensible Space Inspectors. They will learn about Marin WUI, the history of fire in Marin, building construction, defensible space, and how to use our defensible space software. Additionally, our new inspectors are doing a number of “mock” inspections of properties in the Sleepy Hollow area under the supervision of seasoned inspectors to help them start the season strong. Further, new and returning inspectors will take the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) course “Assessing Structure Ignition Potential from Wildfire,” a nationally recognized two-day program that prepares them to take the Wildfire Mitigation Specialist certification. We have invited all Marin County agencies to join us for this incredible training to help standardize the training countywide.

We will start inspections for the 2022 season on April 18th. This year we will inspect homes in the RVFD not inspected in 2021:

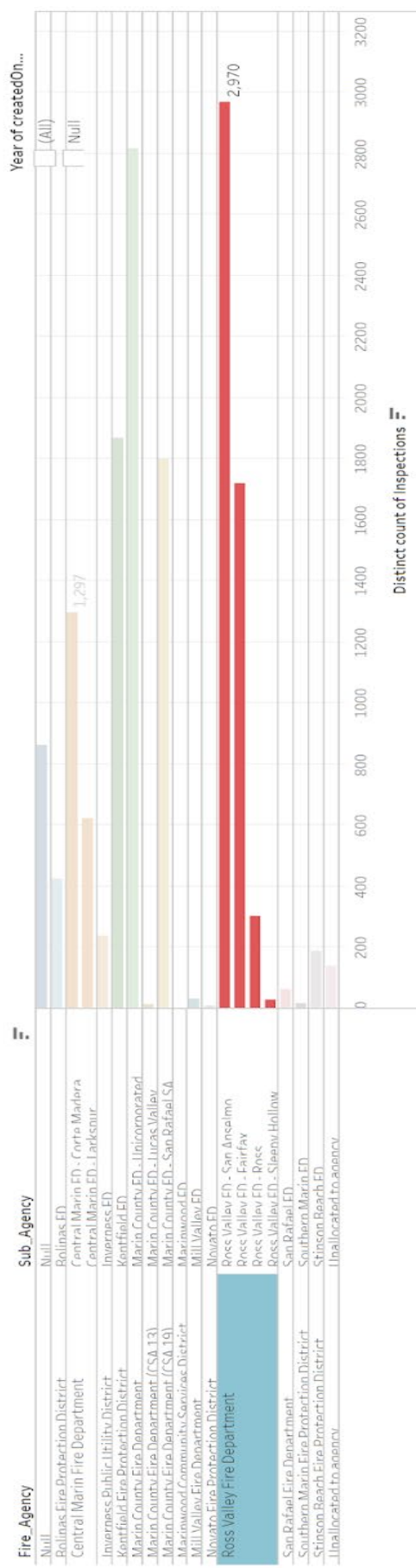
Ross: the MTZ zones of Kent and Shady

San Anselmo: all of Sleepy Hollow and the MTZ zones of Redwood and San Francisco

Fairfax: the MTZ zone of Bothin, Fairfax-Bolinas, Ridgeway



Overall inspections by agency & sub-agency



2021 Inspections for the Ross Valley Fire Department.

This chart shows how many inspections were conducted in RVFD broken out by town.

- San Anselmo: 2970
- Fairfax: 1722
- Ross: 306
- Sleepy Hollow: 29

Note that these numbers don't include 52 re-inspections completed in Fairfax or inspections completed before the software was available. Twenty-two Fairfax and 204 San Anselmo residences received a full inspection before the software was ready, however those inspections were on the standard LE100 inspection form and they have no online report.

Note: February 2022 inspections were by resident request to apply for MWPA grants.

Slider Severity, Resolved, Issue

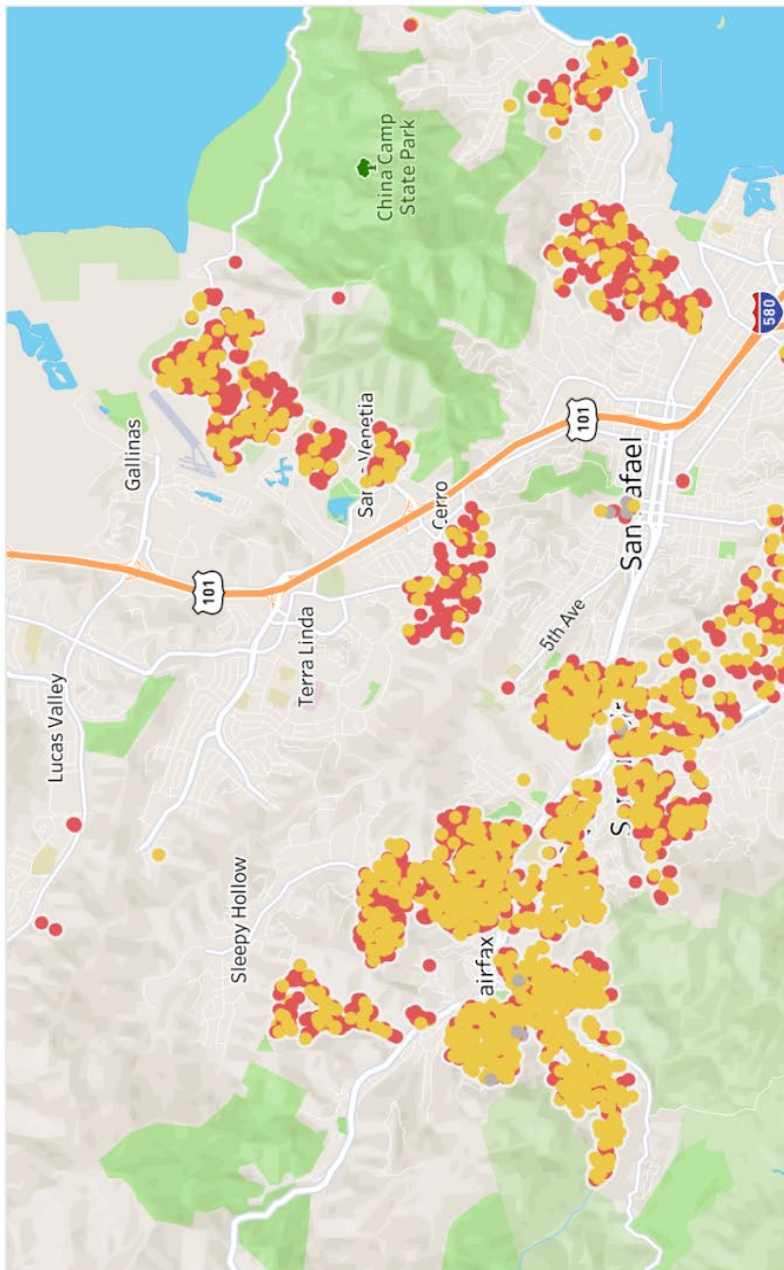
High risk (Red), 1... Medium risk (Yell...
 High risk (Red), 2...
 Medium risk (Yell...

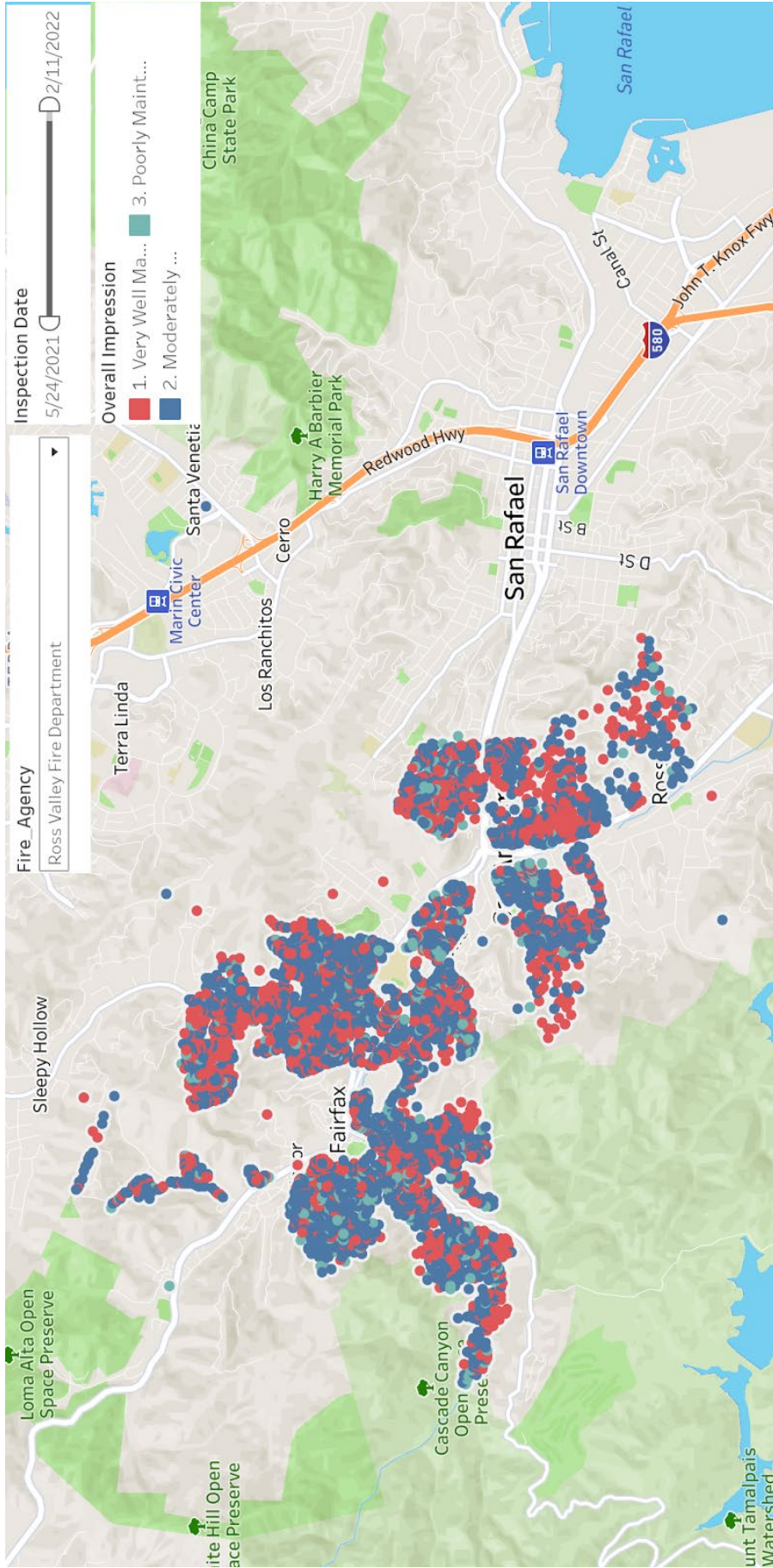
Discovery Name

- Firewood <30' to structure
- Firewood >30' to structure
- Garage Door seal
- Garage Door- Battery Backup
- Garbage & Recycling in Zone 0
- Gasoline cans or other flammable liquids
- Good Condition (Roof)
- Grass clippings
- Grasses & Weeds
- Gutter Guards Present
- Hazardous Species - Acacias
- Hazardous Species - Bamboo
- Hazardous Species - Cypress
- Hazardous Species - French/Scotch Broom
- Hazardous Species - Juniper
- Hazardous Species - Other Hazardous
- Hazardous Species - Pampas Grass

Hazards Map

This is an interactive page that lets us pick out issues that we wish to explore deeper. We can ask such questions as “Where are the juniper located?” “Which towns have lots of Italian Cypress?” “How many homes don’t have adequate vents to keep out embers?” This will help us see what is out there today and potentially see what we can do to help change a particular issue. Also, upon subsequent inspections, it will help us track what improvements have been made and where progress still needs to be made.





Property Maintenance:
 Inspectors can give their subjective impression of each property they evaluate as either “Very Well Maintained,” “Moderately Well Maintained” or “Poorly Maintained. This is just to give us an overall impression of any given area.