



FEMA

Vegetation Made the Difference

San Diego, CA – Herb Peters is convinced that ice plant placed on three sides of his Rancho Bernardo home early in 2007 was a major reason his 1,500-square-foot house did not burn when the Witch Fire roared through his neighborhood during the morning hours of October 21, 2007.

The ice plant and more than 50 feet of wax-leaf ligustrum hedge that lines the north side of his elevated corner lot, facing in the direction from which the Witch Fire came, “had a great deal to do with saving our house,” Peters said.

In April, Peters removed an older type of ice plant that had been growing on the property for well over 20 years and replanted the slopes with 180 flats of the new ice plant. The ice plant is watered three times a week and is “very fire-resistant,” Peters said.

Removing flammable native vegetation and replacing it with low-growing, fire-resistive plants is one of the easiest and most effective ways to create a defensible space, according to the Fire Safe Council. Fire-resistive plants grow close to the ground, grow without accumulating dead branches, needles or leaves, and are easily maintained and pruned, the council said. Some of the more common species of fire-resistive plants include ice plant, periwinkle, rosemary, and African daisy, the council said.

The fire hit the area between 3:30 and 4 a.m. Herb and Jill, got the call to evacuate while they were in Omaha, Nebraska, visiting with family. Peters’ son was taking care of their home. A neighbor across the street called and said burning palm tree fronds “were flying.” Flames and embers blew under tiles of neighboring houses, and the homes “blew up,” the neighbor told Peters.

Houses with asphalt shingles in his neighborhood “are still standing,” Peters said. “Winds were blowing through here at 80 to 100 miles per hour.” He added that “some beautiful multi-million dollar homes” in Rancho Bernardo were destroyed during the conflagration. Houses burned on every side of his home. Peters added that wooden fencing on both sides of West Bernardo Road, a bit more than a block away from his home, acted as a “wick,” or fuel, that fed the fire.

The Witch Fire destroyed 1,125 homes. Another 77 homes were damaged, 499 outbuildings were destroyed, and 26 outbuildings were damaged by the conflagration that blew over Interstate 15 to burn into Mr. and Mrs. Peters’ neighborhood, according to Cal Fire, the state fire agency.

Cinders bounced off the asphalt shingle roof of his home without causing damage to the roof, only burning a piece of outdoor carpeting on the patio, Peters said. Although Peters considers the asphalt shingle roof on his home as “quite fire-resistant,” he will replace it, as soon as he receives his insurance settlement, with new asphalt shingles with a higher fire-resistive rating. He also will install rolls of new R-30 rated insulation in the attic.

Peters said it cost less than \$6,000 to landscape his property with fire-resistant vegetation. That is far less than what it would cost for Herb and Jill Peters to rebuild their home. Peters estimates it would cost \$250,000 to \$275,000 to replace his home.



San Diego County,
California



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

\$6,000.00 (Estimated)

Primary Activity/Project:

Building Codes

Primary Funding:

Homeowner