



FEMA

Community Fire Project Protects Village

Waikoloa Village, HI - One of the largest fires ever recorded on the Big Island of Hawaii torched 25,000 acres of grassland in August of 2005. The wildfire threatened Waikoloa Village, a community of about 5,000 people located on the slopes of Mauna Kea above the Kohala Coast. Fortunately for the residents and property owners, a 30-foot firebreak cleared weeks before by volunteers and members of the Waikoloa Firewise Committee prevented the fire from engulfing the village.

Since its inception in 2003, the Waikoloa Firewise Committee has had several meetings, workshops, and workdays to develop its wildfire risk reduction plans. The committee wants to take active steps toward the prevention and mitigation of wildfires because they are aware of the high risk in the community. Waikoloa Village is located in a rather remote location, surrounded by brush and grass, with a single road used for both entry and exit. The site was used by the United States Army during World War II, which left unexploded munitions buried on the property.

On July 9, 2005, a team of 22 Firewise Committee volunteers united to create the firebreak that saved Waikoloa Village. Local businesses donated equipment, refreshments were provided throughout the workday, and truckloads of burnable material were hauled away.

During the August 2005 wildfire, village residents evacuated as a precaution. No one panicked and the evacuation proceeded smoothly. Upon returning to their homes, the residents found no structural damage. There was soot and smoke in the homes – clear evidence of their proximity to disaster. “The firebreak did its job,” stated Captain Michael Milare. “It provided time for the firefighters to respond, approach the fire, and let us do our job. Without it, the fire would have entered the subdivision and caused serious damage.”

“Firewise works,” stated Pete Hoffman, member of the Hawaii County Council and chairman of the Waikoloa Firewise Committee. The Waikoloa Village Firewise Committee has continued its work with the assistance of a grant from Firewise Communities/USA, and has scheduled a full agenda of workdays. Among the mitigation projects are a demonstration site which will display fire-resistant landscaping and building materials, the creation of a “buffer” zone at the boundary of the village, and the creation of a secondary road for egress from the village.



Hawaii County,
Hawaii



Quick Facts

- Sector:
Public/Private Partnership
- Cost:
\$3,000.00 (Estimated)
- Primary Activity/Project:
Vegetation Management
- Primary Funding:
Property Owner, Residential