

## **Climate Action Committee – Newsletter Update – August 2025**

### ***Potential Fire on the Outer Cape?***

With the droughts we've been experiencing over the past few years (Cape Cod is in a Level 2, or "significant," drought) and the winter of horrendous fires in Southern California, many of us are wondering about the risk of fire on the Outer Cape. I recently had an interesting and informative discussion with Fire Chief Tim Collins and Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for Barnstable, Nantucket, and Dukes Counties Forest Fire Warden Josh Nigro and Forest Fire Patrolman Brian Everett. In addition, Chief Collins and Warden Nigro presented on this topic on June 17 as part of the monthly series the Climate Action Committee and the Truro Library host.

These experts explained that we are in a "high risk, but low incidence area" and that what happened in California probably could not happen here. The high risk is due to factors such as drought, increased temperatures, large areas of trees and brush, the accumulation of dead trees over the last several years due to storms and diseases, and population growth. Unlike Southern California, though, the plants that grow here tend to have more moisture in them, the air is more humid, the sandy soil doesn't support fire, and most of our houses and buildings are relatively far apart. We also don't tend to have lightning strikes, as they do in California, and we haven't had fires start due to problems with electric power lines.

Truro usually has two or three brush fires per year, which tend to burn less than an acre. About ten years ago, there was a fire on Longnook Road that burned one-to-two acres. When we have fires, they have not reached the crowns of trees, which is another positive factor. When fires reach the crowns, the fire spreads more readily, especially if it is windy, and the embers are blown to other areas.

I was impressed with hearing about the training and collaboration that occurs between Cape towns and the DCR. There are trainings that include firefighters from all the Cape towns, and equipment and personnel are shared when there is a fire. A fire is first responded to by the town, then, if and as needed, other neighboring towns are called in, then further away towns, then off-Cape towns and then out-of-state crews. It was clear listening to and seeing the interactions among Chief Collins, Mr. Nigro, and Mr. Everett that there is a close working relationship.

Other information: there are eight fire towers on the Cape, including the one in Wellfleet which is staffed when there is a high fire danger (windy and dry). Truro has 16 fire fighters, three 3,000-gallon fire engines and one water tender (smaller than an engine). The engines have "drop tanks" that are basically collapsible above-ground pools which can be filled with 3,000 gallons of water. Hoses can connect to these and go deep into forested areas, if

needed. Truro only has hydrants between the school and Provincetown. Chief Collins expressed hope for a water tower on the Walsh Property, which would improve the water pressure should there be a fire in areas where there are hydrants. Provincetown will be getting a “brush truck” which can go through brush and small trees to get to areas not easily accessible.

Most fires on the Cape are started by unattended campfires and dumping of ashes from fireplaces and wood stoves, which seem to be extinguished but in fact aren’t. There are many things we can do to lessen the risk of fires on our properties. These include:

- Empty fireplace and wood stove ashes into metal containers to thoroughly burn out before emptying them;
- Clean debris from gutters;
- Comply with the 14-foot roadway clearance requirement on private roads;
- Keep wood piles for fireplaces and stoves 30 feet or more from a building;
- Keep brush piles at least five feet from buildings;
- Clear leaves from under decks and screen them so leaves can’t collect there, and embers can’t enter;
- Keep mulch a couple inches from foundations and consider using shells for driveways and paths rather than mulch;
- Always get a permit from the Fire Department before doing any burns and make sure you’re going to be around, with hoses ready, even the day after you burn;
- Have smoke and CO2 detectors on every level of your home;
- Get a free assessment to determine the level of risk for your home and neighborhood. To do this, contact the Truro Fire Department (508-487-7548), but rather than asking for just your home, first talk with neighbors and get a group together. Fire doesn’t recognize property boundaries.
- Go to [www.Firewise.org](http://www.Firewise.org) for more tips.

During our talk, I wondered about the role of the National Seashore. The National Seashore used to have a staff person to address fire risk and mitigation, and they periodically did prescribed burns. That position is currently empty; it is hoped it will be filled soon. Truro is responsible for responding to fires in the Seashore (67% of Truro is in the Seashore) and depending on the size of a fire, would call for assistance from the DCR and other towns. The Seashore does have one 3,000-gallon engine that the town can use. Towns are not

allowed to do prescribed burns in the Seashore without Seashore authorization. At present, Truro doesn't do prescribed burns on town property, either, and if it was determined we should, Chief Collins would request DCR to assist.

**Save the Date:** On August 28 at 6:00 pm, the Friends of the Truro Meeting House and the Climate Action Committee will be hosting a free Round Table on "Wild Fire Preparedness" with local, regional, and state officials, as well as Cape Cod fire chiefs and National Seashore officials. For more information visit: [truromeetinghousefriends.com/events](http://truromeetinghousefriends.com/events).

Georgia Neill, Climate Action Committee Volunteer

***If interested in volunteering with the Climate Action Committee, contact chair Lili Flanders at [climateaction@truro-ma.gov](mailto:climateaction@truro-ma.gov). Part- or full-time residents welcome!***