

# Position Paper – Kensington Fire Safe Councils 5

## Utility Under-Grounding Kensington

### *History*

- Kensington is a community that was established in the 1920s. The Utility Wires were located in canyons, on property lines and in alleys as an alternative to the “unsightly” wires on the street that were found in other neighborhoods.
- Efforts to have the utilities underground vs. in the canyons and behind houses has met with resistance as this would place utility boxes along the streets.

**Kensington Fire Safe Councils 5** have been established in Kensington for the purpose of creating a *Fire Safe Community*. To this end, efforts have been made to assist residents in creating 100 feet of defensible space around their homes and seminars have been presented on fire safety and evacuation planning.

- The major concern of the FSC community in regards to fire safety continues to be the location of the power lines with transformers in the canyons and along the property lines and in the alleys. The location of the utilities, coupled with the intense hot dry Santa Ana winds that blow east to west (the same direction of three of our canyons and Highway 8) is of significant concern.
- Although residents and SDGE have been diligent trimming trees around the canyon wires, a wire that breaks can set fire to the heavy fuel loads on the ground. Add to this the fact that transformers can explode and start fires. I have observed two transformers explode and spark in the canyon north of Argos.
- Numerous major fires have been started by power lines and transformers. Most notable was the major fire several years ago in Scripps Ranch, during a Santa Ana condition.
- Closer to home was the Normal Heights fire 20 years ago; the cause was never determined, but it started during the strong winds during a Santa Ana condition.

The potential loss of life and property in our community due to fires caused by utility wires and transformers has to be given more weight than the perceived unattractiveness of utility boxes located along the streets. The appearance of utility boxes can be mitigated and result in a safer neighborhood.

--Bev Barrett