



Rebuild Green Expo
Build your healthy, low-carbon future

Friday, February 22, 11-7
Santa Rosa Veteran's Memorial Building
FREE to the public

Page 1 of 2
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Building for the New Normal

Fires once-considered rare are now happening with regularity

The devastating fires that swept through Sonoma County in 2017 left the region with a massive challenge of rebuilding. Then the fires of 2018 wiped out even more communities throughout California, announcing that what were once considered abnormal events are now occurring with regularity. “The abnormal new normal” compels us to build and rebuild with a clear eye towards resilience and sustainability.

What does it mean to build for the new normal? We asked Bruce King, practicing structural engineer and director of the Ecological Building Network to tell us.

Question: What do you mean by “building for the new normal?”

Firefighters are telling us that recent firestorms in California are far more intense than ever before. This is mainly because of the buildup of dry understory in forested country adjacent to development, buildup of vegetation in older towns and suburbs, and the ongoing drought that renders everything drier and more flammable. Whether or not you believe this is tied to climate change, these are the conditions we must live with for the foreseeable future. Building and rebuilding must accommodate this reality.

Question: What are the core considerations that should be applied?

1. Fire-safe landscaping: the choice of plants and their location in relation to structures. Create areas such as paths, walls, decks and such that can act as a fire break, and plant species that are more fire resistant. Your local landscaper should be able to come up with a list that works in your area.
2. Fire-safe construction: non-flammable exterior materials, guarded venting and fire-smart design. If a fire comes through the property, these precautions can be the difference between surviving or not.
3. Go all-electric: skip the explosive gas piped into your home, along with the compromised indoor air quality that comes with it, and get better energy performance to boot.

Question: Can you give examples of what works?

In Northern California, I've seen houses that survived very well because they had no bushes next to the house, and had kept their dry grasses mowed (in some cases through goat and sheep grazing). Plastered straw bale walls resisted ignition and metal roofs didn't let sparks do their worst.

Question: Where can I find the people who can help me navigate this?

Most county and city fire departments have staff dedicated solely to advising citizens on home and neighborhood safety, and there may be grant money available to support “fire-safe” communities. There is also a wealth of information available from the insurance institute for [Building and Home Safety](https://disastersafety.org) (<https://disastersafety.org>) and on the [CalFire website](http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/fire_prevention_wildland_codes) (http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/fire_prevention_wildland_codes).

About the Rebuild Green EXPO

Come get answers on how to build more sustainably and with an eye towards resilience at the Rebuild Green EXPO, February 22, at the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building. The Expo will be open from 11 am to 7 pm. See the possibilities, meet the professionals, and hear experts bust the myths about green building. There will be something for everyone, from homeowners seeking clarity about what green building is, to professionals looking to learn about the nuts and bolts of innovations in green building.

For more information about the Expo visit: www.rebuildgreenexpo.com

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