



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



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Chief's Corner: Short-Term Rentals – Reducing Impacts and Increasing Safety

Tahoe City, Calif. Nov. 14, 2019 – Basin communities are working to ensure Short-Term Rental (STR) properties are compatible with the neighborhoods where they exist, ensuring they are safe for both visitors and their neighbors.

Tourism is up in the region, thanks to the tourism bureaus working hard and increasing visitation, including during midweek and in the off-season. Tourism brings many economic benefits that our communities rely on, but there are challenges with so many visitors staying in our residential communities that must be managed. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) recognized those challenges and through their leadership, the Short-Term Rental Neighborhood Compatibility Working Group was formed, ensuring stakeholder and public interest were represented in policy discussions. The Local Government and Housing Committee voted for a code amendment making neighborhood compatibility a criterion when counties are scored for future releases of residential allocations in the Basin.

We applaud the leadership from TRPA that has led counties to address the impacts of STRs. Not only for nuisance issues like garbage and parking, but for safety issues that are near and dear to our hearts in the fire service. We now have the ability to inspect STRs on a regular interval for safety issues such as over-occupancy, fire risk, and safety measures that many visitors assume are in place like unobstructed exits, working smoke and CO alarms, and fire extinguishers.

Fire chiefs in recreational communities face a unique set of challenges to meet the demands of tourism. In North Tahoe Fire's service area, 25% of residential units are registered as STRs. This summer, a 98% increase in lodging occupancy, including STRs, correlated to a 119% increase in calls for fire and emergency medical service. This is no surprise given the recreational opportunities and activities that draw so many visitors to our region. Firefighters are called upon for a broad range of complex technical rescues, along with responding to more general calls due to the increase in visitors. Property taxes that pay for traditional fire service were not designed for the influx in population and activity that recreational communities are experiencing with the availability of the online STR market. While Basin communities that rely on tourism collect funds through Tourism Occupancy Taxes or Tourism Business Improvement Districts, those funds do not support fire districts.

Nearly fifty percent of all STRs in the Basin are located in North Tahoe's service area, and regulation on STR safety is an important tool in keeping the community safe. In Placer County a STR ordinance is under review to include a ban on wood-burning fire pits and charcoal barbecues. The biggest threat to our region is fire, and visitors are typically unfamiliar with ignition sources, fire awareness, and the level of risk we face. We are appreciative of the support we've received from Placer County in drafting an ordinance that gives visitors a safe place to stay without exacerbating fire danger in our community.



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At the November 12th Washoe County Board of Commissioners' meeting, the commissioners discussed and provided direction for Washoe County to establish standards and a permitting process for STR's in unincorporated Washoe County, and putting those into code language for a 21-day public comment period.

For information on the Short-Term Rental Neighborhood Compatibility Group Work Program and STR ordinance information for the various agencies in the Basin, visit [TRPA](#).

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