

[Oakland hills My Word: Preventing repeat of 1991 fire begins with you](#)

East Bay Times

This month — Thursday of this week to be exact — is the 25th anniversary of the Oakland/Berkeley hills firestorm. Many of you were here that day. Some of you — like my husband and me — escaped the flames with just the clothes on our back and the knowledge that our lives would never be the same.

In the years since, my husband and I have dedicated ourselves to wildfire prevention. This is not just to be sure that Oakland residents living in the hills won't have to flee for their lives when the next firestorm hits — as it surely will, given five years of California drought, the growing numbers of dead and dying trees, and the unusual topography of the Caldecott Tunnel that leads to small fires every year and major wildfires every 20 years.

No, more important is the desire to ensure that people won't have to face the insecurity and overwhelming nature of recovery after a major disaster. So take action like your life and those of your loved ones depend on it:

Know your neighbors — for we will depend on our neighbors in a disaster way before the cavalry of firefighters and other emergency workers reach our block. Become a CORE volunteer (www2.oaklandnet.com) and help prepare your neighborhood to recover following a disaster. Create defensible space around your house — and be sure your neighbors do as well, for we are all dependent on the weakest link in our neighborhood. (www.oaklandnet.com or www.oaklandfiresafecouncil.org).

Create a disaster plan — the time to do it is before the next disaster. Who do you need to contact? What important information do you need, and where is it located — you can post much of it, including treasured photos and your home inventory up in the clouds (www.redcross.org).

Make sure you have sufficient insurance — and that you understand what it means. It's too late when you have to rely on it for disaster recovery (www.uphelp.org).



And live each day as if it is your last. Don't wait to tell your family and friends you love them, and do something meaningful each and every day

Sue Piper is a 1991 firestorm survivor; chair of the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District; chair of the Oakland Firesafe Council, and board member of United Policyholders.