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Home firefighting system attracts interest

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published November 10, 2003)

News reports of a Southern California man who successfully defended his home against fire in the San Bernardino Mountains last month brought joy and relief to David and Gloria Evraiff of Pollock Pines.

They were grateful that Cedar Glen resident John Lucas had survived the ordeal with much of his property intact, and they were gratified to learn that the Home Firefighting System they designed for him earlier this year had assisted in the effort.

"This is the first documented 'save' for our system," said David Evraiff, a self-taught electrical and mechanical engineer who began marketing the system in 1999 after developing it for his own home in El Dorado County.

The Evraiffs, who market the system primarily over the Internet, said they were inundated with calls during the recent Southern California fires. With firefighting resources stretched thin, many homeowners faced the prospect of defending their homes alone. Although many realized they were too late for this fire season, they were looking ahead to the next.

Designed for property owners who have on-site water storage -- a tank, swimming pool, pond or even a 500-gallon hot tub -- the basic equipment includes a hand cart outfitted with a 6-or 9-horsepower pump, forestry fire hose, pistol-grip nozzles and a kit that dispenses foam to coat a house or vegetation.

A cart system -- not including the water source -- can cost from \$2,000 to \$4,000 depending on the amount of hose and accessories. "The hose is the biggest investment," David Evraiff said.

Neither the Evraiffs nor fire officials recommend using such a system to fight a fire. But combined with good vegetation management, they say, it can help protect property and improve the chances that a home will survive a wildfire after the homeowner has left for a safe place.

"These systems can have a place in the world of fire protection," said Teri Mizuhara, a fire prevention specialist with the Amador-El Dorado Unit of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"It's a line of defense, and it's certainly better than evacuating without a line of defense," she said.

Fire protection was what David Evraiff had in mind six years ago when he began building his house on a ridge overlooking the south fork of the American River. His five acres extend down a slope and border federal forest land.

"I planned to put a ridge sprinkler system on the roof," he said, but just watering down the roof, he decided, wouldn't be enough.



David Evraiff demonstrates his Home Firefighting System on his Pollock Pines home. Evraiff is a self-taught electrical and mechanical engineer who began marketing the system in 1999 after developing it for his own home in El Dorado County.

The Evraiffs also have installed two 5,000-gallon storage tanks on their property to feed small hydrants around the house.

"Pressure and flow are important when you don't have a lot of water," David Evraiff said. A garden hose attached to a faucet, he added, isn't effective.

The Evraiffs also have screened the chimney, vents and other openings on the house to prevent hot ashes from getting inside the walls or attic.

They have cleared brush and cut roads on the hillside to help stop or slow a fire. They are participating in the Independence Fuel Break program, a cooperative effort of private property owners, CDF and the U.S. Forest Service.

"You are required to have defensible space. What we say is, 'Defend your defensible space,' " said David Evraiff, citing his business motto.

He discourages people who are either unwilling or unable to maintain a fuel break from purchasing his system. The two, he said, go hand in hand.

He stressed that the system is not something homeowners can buy at the last minute. Evraiff tailors the systems to each property owners' needs.

People need to practice hooking it up and operating it before an emergency arises. And, he said, they must be prepared to maintain the equipment and test it periodically, just as they would a smoke alarm.



Don Erickson, a broker with Atwood Insurance Agency in Placerville, said that from the standpoint of an insurer, a home firefighting system is not a reliable form of fire protection because it depends on someone being home to use it.

"It's not an automatic source of protection," he said.

Insurance companies look for a reliable water supply, usually hydrants, and an alarm system that is monitored by a central station, Erickson said.

Nevertheless Evraiff's system is gaining a following.

One fan is Keith Crabtree, an agriculture instructor who teaches ranch management classes at Sierra College's campuses in Rocklin and Grass Valley.

He regularly invites David Evraiff, along with representatives of various fire agencies, to participate in class field days.

In the case of wildfires, Crabtree said, "the only thing we've got control over is to be prepared."

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Carl Costas

About the Writer

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