

Marin crew fights fire hazards

'Defensible space' can protect homes from blazes

By **MORNING STAR VASQUEZ**
Staff Writer

A group of homeowners in central Windsor Monday used the crew of the Marin Conservation Corps, based in San Rafael, to clear 12-15 feet of "defensible space" behind their homes. The project is creating a total barrier of 30 feet behind the homes clear of downed trees, dead wood, brush and dry grass that would cause damage to their homes in the case of fire.

Windsor fire chief Matt Gustafson was grateful for the homeowners' efforts, which would not only protect their homes but the homes in adjacent subdivisions and neighborhoods.

"Any help we can get from home owners, the city and business owners with an emphasis on planting green belts and getting away from flashy fuels is a help," Gustafson said. Flashy fuels are dry grasses that are



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FLASHY FIGHTERS — Juan Carlos and Ben Hightower of San Rafael clear brush and other fire hazards from central Windsor Monday. The representatives of Marin Conservation Corps were hired by a homeowners association to carry out the task.

highly susceptible to fire and can burn at an intense heat, igniting items that normally do not catch flame. The area that the 10-man crew worked on catches fire two to five times a year, and the work they are doing reduces that effect, said Gustafson.

Gustafson called the efforts of the homeowners diligent, in "helping us to help them."

John Williams, site supervisor and a retired fireman, praised the work of the Conservation Corps, who were working hard in the afternoon

heat clearing brush and cutting dead wood with chainsaws. The height of the fire season is September and October, especially with the eastern winds, he said. The crew, said Williams, were a group of hard workers that "can get the job done in a timely manner."

The work prevents the "laddering of fuels" that could cause damage to homeowners' property. At the bottom layer are the flashy fuels, at the second layer the brush; the third layer is made up of overhanging limbs of trees and the fourth is the

free canopy of trees that ends at houses' rooftops.

The Marin Conservation Corps was founded in 1982. More than 3,000 youths have participated in its education programs, which promote academic skills, employability and career opportunities. Most of the participants come from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Marin County, including San Rafael's Canal Area, Marin City and unincorporated county neighborhoods.

For more information, visit www.windsorfire.net.