



Kensington Emergency Preparedness Report

May 2026

Emergency Preparedness Coordinator: Johnny Valenzuela

Kensington's emergency preparedness initiatives continue to show measurable community engagement across vegetation management, ember risk reduction, Firewise participation, and CERT organizing. Grant and pilot program activity indicate increasing resident awareness, stronger neighborhood-level participation, and growing receptiveness to mitigation actions that reduce wildfire risk around structures and along public corridors.

Hazardous Vegetation Removal Reimbursement (HVRR)

The grant application period closes on May 31, 2026. Applications will be reviewed by the Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee on June 4 and then forwarded to the Kensington Community Services District Board for the June 2026 monthly board meeting.

Eucalyptus removal has increased in this application cycle compared with previous rounds, suggesting a stronger public understanding of the risks posed by high-risk vegetation. Community awareness also appears to be increasing more broadly, with residents showing greater willingness to make vegetation changes near structures in support of hazard reduction goals.

A proposed project on Willamette Avenue would remove sidewalk vegetation and improve the availability of off-street parking. The proposal reflects awareness-building generated by the 2025 Willamette Avenue Study and Poll, while Firewise leads continue to promote the reimbursement program and encourage residents to address targeted plants along roadways and fence lines where shared risk is a concern.

Although the number of applications for this program is lower than in prior funding cycles, residents are removing hazardous vegetation without participating in this program, allowing others to benefit from the resources.

Residents who have used the program in the past and have become ineligible for future funding have looked toward coordinating with neighbors to leverage the Measure X Community Chipping Program.

Kensington Ember Exclusion Program (KEEP)

The Ember Exclusion Program application period also closes on May 31, 2026. Since April 1, 2026, the pilot program has received more than 80 applications, indicating a strong early response from residents.

Residents appear increasingly aware of ember cast risk and are evaluating their properties for ways to reduce ember propagation and prevent ember intrusion into structures. Feedback from applicants also suggests interest in expanding the program to cover additional mitigation features, especially decks and gutters.

Red Flag Ready- Flag Placement Plan

A study is currently underway to determine storage, access, placement, and distribution needs for the Red Flag Warning flags. A report is in development, and its recommendations will be presented to the Emergency Preparedness Committee for consideration and development of a recommendation to the Board of Directors.

As CERT and Firewise volunteer capacity continues to grow, both groups may become viable partners for flag distribution when the National Weather Service declares Red Flag Warnings affecting Kensington in National Weather Zone 508. The flags are intended to serve as visible reminders on key streets identified by KCSD as subject to parking restrictions during Red Flag Days, and additional flag purchases are expected to be proposed for review.

Firewise

Kensington now has 22 recognized Firewise communities, including Trinity and Cambridge, which were recognized earlier this year. Door hangers have been distributed throughout Firewise communities to notify residents of their status, encourage certificate downloads, and support insurance-related use of that recognition.

The door hangers also direct residents to the Kensington Firewise website for information. Neighborhood engagement continues to build, as shown by the Sunset Firewise block event held on May 14 and by increasing collaboration among Firewise leads across communities.

Firewise leaders are reinforcing preparedness messaging and strengthening the impact of KCSD initiatives, which is reflected in program applications and resident inquiries submitted to KCSD and the El Cerrito Kensington Fire Department. More broadly, Firewise formation appears to be improving coordination and relationships among neighbors, our public safety agencies, and neighboring organizations such as the Berkeley Fire Safe Council and El Cerrito Fire Safe Council.

CERT

The recent Community Kick-Off was well attended, drawing more than 55 participants from El Cerrito and Kensington. The event also helped increase interest in the CERT course that El Cerrito Kensington Fire plans to conduct in Fall 2026.

El Cerrito Kensington CERT now has a steering committee that meets weekly to build the organization and support a sustainable, community-led emergency response capability. At the block level, a May 9 meeting on Richardson achieved 50 percent participation, with 13 of 26 households attending.