

## Sprinklers can shield wood home from fire

At press of a button entire home protected

Fire retardant system covers garden area, too

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

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CANMORE, Alta.—Stefan Varga believes that people who live in wooden houses should take steps to protect themselves against fire.

That's why the house Varga and his wife Emma are having built in this rocky mountain town will come armed with the same weapon — without the red dye used for aerial marking — used by firefighters for decades to battle forest fires.

The couple's 4,200 sq.-ft. home, which will be a mix of cedar shingles, cedar panelling and stone, will come with a series of sprinklers that will, at the press of a button, coat the exterior, and even the surrounding gardens with a fire retardant spray.

Firebreak Canada's FireShield is non-toxic, non-staining and stays in place until it's washed off by rain or hose, and is Canada's first self-contained fire suppression system that can automatically coat the exterior of homes with fire retardant, says company president Frank Holemans.

"If you live in an area where there are earthquakes, you build a home to withstand the threat but until now there hasn't been a good option to protect a home from the threat of fire," says Holemans.

The system is self-contained and doesn't need electricity or water to operate and, as the fire retardant is fertilizer based, it will not harm plants and may actually promote healthy growth, he says.

Firebreak Canada has been installing FireShield systems in homes in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan for the last two years. The company is now offering the same service in Ontario and hopes to attract customers in Muskoka where multi-million dollar homes are located in heavily wooded and often remote and hard-to-access areas, says Holemans.

"I lived in Ontario for a number of years so I know the area well and I think that there will be a really good market there," says Holemans.

Cost of an installed system ranges from under \$5,000 for a smaller cottage up to 1,500 square feet and rises to \$9,000 to protect a 5,000-sq.-ft. home.

While Holemans makes no claim that the system would protect a home in the case of a major forest fire when temperatures get so hot that the home "would melt if it didn't catch fire," he does believe that it would save it in the case of sparks flying from a nearby fire.

Varga agrees.

"In Canmore many of the neighbouring houses have cedar roofs, lots of wooden siding and a lot of nearby trees ... the system will provide a cheap insurance that my house will not go up in smoke before, hopefully, the fire can be controlled," says Varga.

The system can be activated by the push of a button if the homeowner spots a neighbouring fire while at home or by a telephone call to the activation system if a homeowner is away but hears there is a fire in the area.

It won't, however, offer much protection from a fire that starts inside the home.

For an extra \$15,000 to \$17,000 FireBreak offers FireAlert — a solar-powered sensor that is capable of

detecting fires burning several kilometres away.

The system automatically performs a 360-degree scan of the horizon every four minutes hunting for fires. If it spots a fire it then automatically contacts the local fire department and activates the FireShield system, says Holemans.

"When you consider that people are spending millions of dollars to build a home the cost of this kind of protection is minimal," he says.

The fire retardant is stored in a tank similar to a large hot water tank, which can be recharged for a nominal amount — around \$200 — if the system has been activated. The small nozzles that spray the fire retardant are usually placed under the eaves and on the roof. The system can be added to an existing building, but it is more cost-efficient to have it installed at the time of construction, says Holemans.

Varga, 38, works on oil rigs off Norway and is away from home a lot. He says the peace of mind the system will afford him is priceless.

"I'm sure you've heard the phrase that people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, well the same applies here. People in wooden houses should take steps to protect against fire."

AlanRidge Homes installed a FireShield system in its \$4.1 million show home at Three Sisters Mountain Village in Canmore and got such a positive response that the company has installed the system in its new 29-unit town home Canmore Villas project at Three Sisters.

"A lot of our purchasers are from outside markets in other parts of Canada or Europe so use their home here periodically and it gives them peace of mind to know that this kind of system is in place," says Ron Rinkel, president AlanRidge Homes.

The town homes back onto the Stewart Creek Golf Course at Three Sisters and come with luxurious fittings. Prices range from \$1.1 million to \$1.4 million, so the added cost of the FireShield system is only a small portion of the purchase price, says Rinkel.

The addition of FireShield can reduce household insurance premiums, which helps offset some of the cost of installation, says Rinkel.

Most of the absentee homeowners hire a local property management company to take care of their home while they are away. If the company hears there is a fire the FireShield system can be activated by telephone or computer link.

"It's protection from afar," says Rinkel.

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For more information go to <http://www.firebreakcanada.com> or call 1-877-331-7233.

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