

WILDFIRE DEFENSE TO HELP YOUR HOME

DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Keep your property lean and green to help protect your family and home!

Defensible space, coupled with home hardening, is essential to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. **Defensible space is the buffer you create between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it.** This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire and it helps protect your home from catching fire - either from embers, direct flame contact or radiant heat. Proper defensible space also provides firefighters a safe area to work in, to defend your home.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE ZONES

Zones 1 and 2 currently make up the 100 feet of defensible space required by law. Assembly Bill 3074, passed into law in 2020, requires a third zone for defensible space. This law requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to develop the regulation for a new ember-resistant zone (Zone 0) within 0 to 5 feet of the home by January 1, 2023. The intensity of wildfire fuel management varies within the 100-foot perimeter of the home, with more intense fuels' reduction occurring closer to your home. Start at the home and work your way out to 100 feet or to your property line, whichever is closer.

ZONE 0 – Ember-Resistant Zone

Zone 0 extends 5 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc.

The ember-resistant zone is currently not required by law, but science has proven it to be the most important of all the defensible space zones. This zone includes the area under and around all attached decks, and requires the most stringent wildfire fuel reduction. The ember-resistant zone is designed to keep fire or embers from igniting materials that can spread the fire to your home. The following provides guidance for this zone, which may change based on the regulation developed by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection.

- Use hardscape like gravel, pavers, concrete and other noncombustible mulch materials. No combustible bark or mulch.
- Remove all dead and dying weeds, grass, plants, shrubs, trees, branches and vegetative debris (leaves, needles, cones, bark, etc.); Check your roofs, gutters, decks, porches, stairways, etc.
- Remove all branches within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe outlet.
- Limit plants in this area to low growing, nonwoody, properly watered and maintained plants.
- Limit combustible items (outdoor furniture, planters, etc.) on top of decks.
- Relocate firewood and lumber to Zone 2.
- Replace combustible fencing, gates, and arbors attached to the home with noncombustible alternatives.
- Consider relocating garbage and recycling containers outside this zone.
- Consider relocating boats, RVs, vehicles and other combustible items outside this zone.

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ZONE 1 – Lean, Clean and Green Zone

Zone 1 extends 30 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Remove all dead plants, grass and weeds (vegetation).
- Remove dead or dry leaves and pine needles from your yard, roof and rain gutters.
- Remove branches that hang over your roof and keep dead branches 10 feet away from your chimney.
- Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees.
- Relocate wood piles to Zone 2.
- Remove or prune flammable plants and shrubs near windows.
- Remove vegetation and items that could catch fire from around and under decks, balconies and stairs.
- Create a separation between trees, shrubs and items that could catch fire, such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets, etc.

ZONE 2 – Reduce Fuel Zone

Zone 2 extends from 30 feet to 100 feet out from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of 4 inches.
- Create horizontal space between shrubs and trees.
- Create vertical space between grass, shrubs and trees.
- Remove fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches. However, they may be permitted to a depth of 3 inches.
- All exposed wood piles must have a minimum of 10 feet of clearance, down to bare mineral soil, in all directions.

ZONE 1 & 2

"Outbuildings" and Liquid Propane Gas (LPG) storage tanks shall have 10 feet of clearance to bare mineral soil and no flammable vegetation for an additional 10 feet around their exterior.

Local Ordinances

Many local government agencies have local ordinances for defensible space or weed abatement. These local ordinances will often be more stringent than the State's minimum requirements listed above (e.g., San Diego County requires 50 feet of clearance in Zone 1). Check with your local fire department or fire protection district for any additional defensible space or weed abatement ordinance requirements.

Plant and Tree Spacing

The spacing between grass, shrubs, and trees is crucial to reduce the spread of wildfires. The spacing needed is determined by the type and size of brush and trees, as well as the slope of the land. For example, a property on a steep slope with larger vegetation requires greater spacing between trees and shrubs than a level property that has small, sparse vegetation.

VERTICAL SPACING

- Remove all tree branches at least 6 feet from the ground.
- Allow extra vertical space between shrubs and trees. Lack of vertical space can allow a fire to move from the ground to the brush to the treetops like a ladder. This leads to more intense fire closer to your home.
- A good rule of thumb is to allow a minimum vertical clearance of 3X the height of a shrub to the lowest branches of a tree above it.

HORIZONTAL SPACING

Horizontal spacing depends on the slope of the land and the height of the shrubs or trees. For level ground and mild slopes, allow twice the distance of the width of a shrub between shrubs, and at least ten feet between trees. Moderate to steep slopes require considerably more distance between shrubs and between trees.

For more information please visit: https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/

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