

Wildfires, Creating a Defensible Space

Wildfires are among the nation's growing natural hazards. Though wildfires are natural and often beneficial in less populated areas, more and more homes and lives are being threatened. We have seen this most recently with the Rim Fire. We think that if we get fire ready in May and June we are good to go for the whole fire season. But that is not true. Weeds grow, leaves and needles fall. Please review what is considered Defensible Space below.

What can be done to reduce buildings loss from wildfire? The answer is defensible space – reduce flammable material around homes to keep direct flames and heat away from the side of the building. The law requires property owners to create 100 feet of defensible space around buildings

California Public Resources Code 4291

Why 100 feet? – The goal is to protect you while providing a safe area for firefighters. Think of your property in two parts or zones.

Zone 1 – extends 30 feet out from home and decks

Remove all dead plants, grass and weeds (vegetation)

Remove dead or dry leaves and pine needles from your yard, roof and rain gutter.

Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees and 6 feet above the roof

Remove branches that hang over your roof and keep dead branches 10 feet away from your chimney.

Relocating wood piles into ***Zone 2*** is recommended but not required by law.

Remove or prune flammable plants and shrubs near windows.

Remove vegetation and items that could catch fire from around and under decks.

Create a separation between trees, shrubs and items that could catch fire such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets, etc.

Zone 2 – extends 100 feet out from home and decks

Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of 4 inches.

Create horizontal spacing between shrubs and trees.

Create vertical spacing 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 **IF** erosion control is an issue.

In all cases, dead, dry and woody vegetation must be removed. Plant material near structures should be regularly irrigated and well maintained, ornamental, low-growing fire retardant shrubs, low-growing turf and succulent ground cover. Using native plant materials especially in non-irrigated areas is highly recommended. Fire-safe landscaping isn't necessarily the same thing as a well-maintained yard. Avoid planting in large clusters. It's best to create small planter beds or islands. Use decorative rock, flagstone, gravel or stepping stones to break up planter areas. Utilize mulch in planter areas. Mulch retains moisture, benefiting the nearby plant material, reduces weed growth and helps with erosion. There are many organic mulches, but avoid using conifer or pine needles. These types of mulches catch fire quickly and will rapidly spread a fire. Owners should keep the surrounding areas near structures clean and free of debris, including fallen leaves and downed branches or trees. These are just a few guidelines for creating a defensible space to help reduce the spread of wildfires.