

Defensible Space – Zones 0, 1, and 2

Defensible space activities must accompany the home hardening activities or must have already been completed.

Zone 0 - Within 5 feet from structures including attachments

- Remove all vegetation within 5 feet of the structure, including adjacent to or under decks. This includes all grass, herbaceous ground covers, plants, shrubs, and bushes, both dead/dying or living.
- Shrub and bush root balls may be removed within the 0 – 5' zone; however, tree root balls will be treated consistent with all other zones (cut and ground to grade).
- Remove all woodchips, bark, combustible mulch, or synthetic lawns.
- Remove all live and dead tree branches 10 feet above the roof and 10 feet away from chimneys and stovepipe outlets. Remove all live or dead branches or ladder fuels within five feet (5 feet) of the sides of the structure.
- Install a permeable weed barrier and gravel.
- Additional soil may be applied for erosion control and drainage.
- Qualified contractors shall prepare a hardscaping site plan that includes all areas around the structure including any attached decks with procedures for avoiding utilities and securing irrigation lines.
- Hand tools such as shovels and rakes will be used to remove vegetation and smooth the surface in preparation for gravel installation.

Zone 1 – Extends from 5 to 30 feet out from buildings, structures, decks, etc., or to the property line, whichever is closer.

- Remove all dead or dying trees, plants, shrubs, branches, grass, and weeds (vegetation).
- Keep all branches a minimum of 10 feet away from chimney or stovepipe outlets.
- Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees.

- Relocate wood piles to a minimum of 30 feet from all structures/other improvements and 10 feet from any property line.
- Remove vegetation and items that could catch fire and are adjacent to or 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 – Extends 30 to 100 feet (or up to 200 feet if warranted based on site conditions) out from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to the 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 in accordance with CAL FIRE recommendations (CAL FIRE 2023a; Figure 3 in Appendix A).
- Create vertical space between shrubs and trees in accordance with CAL FIRE recommendations (CAL FIRE 2023a; Figure 3 in Appendix A).
- Dead and dying woody surface and aerial fuels shall be removed.
- Loose surface litter, normally consisting of fallen leaves or needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches, shall be permitted to a maximum depth of 3 inches.
- Provide a minimum of 10 feet of clearance around exposed wood piles, down to bare mineral soil, in all directions.

All Zones

- Provide 10 feet of clearance and no flammable vegetation for an additional 10 feet around the exterior of outbuildings and liquid propane gas storage tanks.
- Ensure address numbers are displayed in contrasting colors, are at least 4 inches tall, and are readable from the street or access road. Replace numbering, if necessary, to meet these standards.
- Relocate wood piles to follow relevant state and local ordinances.
- Replace the first 5 feet of any retaining walls with noncombustible materials.

Defensible space creation work is expected to occur within 100 feet of structures in almost all cases; however, work may extend up to 200 feet from structures if necessary to protect life, property, or natural resources from wildfire, such as in steeply sloped areas. Defensible space creation work would involve trimming and cutting herbaceous vegetation, shrubs, and trees/tree branches within the specified defensible space zones. The vertical and horizontal spacing between retained vegetation would depend on slope, vegetation size, vegetation type (e.g., brush, grass, trees), and other fuel characteristics (e.g., fuel compaction and chemical content) (CAL FIRE 2023a; Figure 3 in Appendix A). As such, the minimum clearance between retained woody vegetation is expected to range from 4 to 40 feet in all directions, both horizontally and vertically. Where it may be possible to achieve defensible space while retaining a stand of larger trees with a continuous canopy, the following treatments would be applied:

- Remove all surface fuels greater than 4 inches in height. Retained trees must be well-spaced, well-pruned, and create a condition that avoids fire spread to other vegetation or to a building or structure.
- Remove the lower limbs of retained trees to height of 6 to 15 feet above the ground surface.

Properties with greater fire hazards, such as steeper slopes or more severe fire danger, would require pruning heights in the upper end of this range. For smaller trees, remove the lower third of branches.

No vegetation would be uprooted; all vegetation would be trimmed or cut to either ground level or approximately 1 inch above ground level. Tree removal would largely be limited to dead or dying trees. In rare cases, healthy trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at breast height may be removed where they pose a safety risk. Tree root balls would be left in place for erosion control, although some shrub and bush roots may be removed if within Zone 0.

Cut woody material would either be chipped and scattered on-site or taken to an approved landfill or equivalent facility along with any waste from home hardening/retrofitting activities. Any equipment needed to conduct fuel reduction work would be staged and stored at the specific job site, making every effort to store materials, tools, and equipment on previously disturbed paved or graveled surfaces such as driveways or parking pads.