

A Homeowner's *Guide* to
DEFENSIBLE SPACE
& Ornamental Vegetation Maintenance

An informational guide produced
by the Poway Fire Department for residents
in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

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Wildfire is Coming, Are You Ready?

The Poway Fire Department takes great measures to protect you and your home from wildfire but we need your help to prepare your home and landscape to be wildfire ready.

Over-planting near your home and not maintaining your ornamental landscaping increases your fire risk. Creating and maintaining defensible space is essential for increasing your home's chance of surviving a wildfire.

Defensible space slows the spread of wildfire and improves the safety of firefighters defending your home. It creates a buffer between your home and the flammable vegetation.

There are three ways your home can be exposed to wildfire: by direct flame contact, radiant heat exposure, or through flying embers. Embers are responsible for most structure damage during wildfires. They can accumulate on your home, deck or porch and ignite plants, mulch, leaves, fencing or furniture.

Embers are small pieces of burning material that can travel more than a mile ahead of a wildfire. They can create spot fires when they land on combustible materials, such as leaves in your gutter or plants under your windows.



Get Ready!

This guide details the most critical landscape conditions and clarifies what should be done to prepare your home for the greatest chance of survival from an approaching wildfire.

Fire Safety Checklist



The key to defensible space is preventing conditions where fire can travel from adjacent vegetation, through an ornamental landscape, to your structure. On your property, *within 100 feet of your home*, create defensible space by:

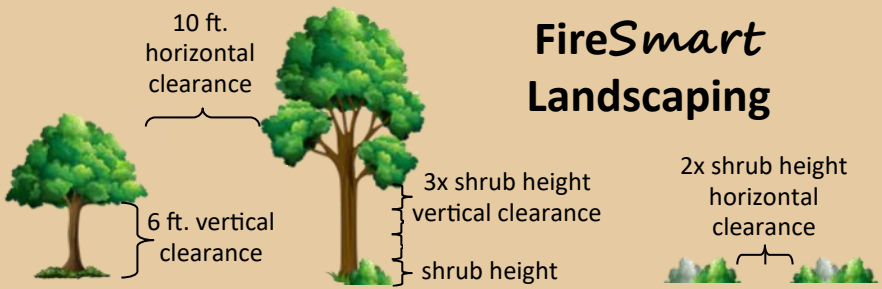
- Removing all dead plants, grass, and weeds. **
- Removing dead or dying tree and shrub branches that overhang your roof, are near windows, or touch wall surfaces. Keep all branches at least ten feet from chimney or stovepipe outlets. **
- Removing leaves, needles, or other vegetation from your roof, gutters, deck, and porch. **
- Cutting annual grasses to a maximum height of four inches and trimming highly-flammable chaparral to a maximum height of twelve inches. ** *A brush clearance permit may be needed, chaparral may only be cleared up to 100 ft from the home.*
- Pruning live trees and shrubs to create vertical separation between plantings. **
- Creating islands of vegetation with horizontal spacing between shrubs and trees. ** *The removal of native trees requires a tree removal permit.*
- Replacing highly flammable plant species with low-growing, non-woody plants in the areas closest to your home.
- Removing flammable vegetation from around decks. **

*** Required by the California Code of Regulations for homes in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.*

Best Practices for Defensible Space

Ladder Fuels and Fuel Continuity

Fire needs fuel to burn, vegetation is fuel. A fuel ladder occurs when grass or other surface fuel carries flames into shrubs or small trees and then the fire climbs into larger trees—a continuous vertical line of fuel. Surface and ladder fuel is almost always necessary to sustain fire in upper tree branches.



Sensitive Habitat and the Environment

The City of Poway is home to thousands of acres of sensitive habitat and protected open space. The need for fire safety and defensible space must be balanced with the need to protect the sensitive habitat found within our community. Homes adjacent to open space or a biological conservation easement may require a home assessment by the Fire Department and a no-fee brush clearance permit prior to the cutting of any native chapparal.

The Defensible Space Program

Homes currently enrolled in Poway's Defensible Space Program should still ensure that ornamental landscaping meets the requirements outlined on the Fire Safety Checklist (page 2). Requirements for the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone are not lessened by Poway's Defensible Space Program.

Take the Next Step with *Zone 0*

Science has proved that the first five feet surrounding your home is the most important defensible space zone. Keeping this area clear of combustible materials creates an ember-resistant zone designed to keep fire or embers from igniting material that can spread the fire to your home.

Zone 0

Zone 0 is the first five feet surrounding buildings, decks, and other structures. Taking this step greatly improves the chance of your home surviving a wildfire.

- Use noncombustible materials such as rock, stone pavers, cement, bare earth, gravel, or sand. Do not use combustible bark or mulch within this zone.
- Remove all plants and shrubs near windows.
- Limit plants in this area to low growing, non-woody, properly watered and maintained plants.
- Limit combustible items (outdoor furniture, planters, etc.) on top of decks that may capture embers.
- Relocate firewood and lumber to be stored at least 30 feet from your home.
- Replace combustible fencing, gates, and arbors attached to your home with noncombustible alternatives.
- Relocate garbage and recycling containers outside this zone.
- Relocate boats, RV's, vehicles, and other combustible items outside this zone.

Recommendations for Ornamental Vegetation Maintenance



Trees Touching or Overhanging Structures

Trim trees and shrubs so branches do not hang over the roof or touch the structure. Cut away any dead or dying branches.

Heat Sources

Trim vegetation to be at least ten feet away from heat sources like chimneys, stove pipes, or exhaust vents.



Vines or Climbing Plants

Remove plants that are growing directly on your home, especially when growing on combustible materials.

Rain Gutters

Keep roofs, rain gutters, and other areas clear of fallen leaves, pine needles, or other dead material.



Recommendations for Ornamental Vegetation Maintenance



Continuous Vegetation

Create space between the tops of shrubs and the lowest tree limbs. Create islands of vegetation with space between groupings.

Keep Windows Clear

Trim shrubs away from windows as much as possible. Cut away any dead or dying branches.



Flammable Plants

Replace flammable plants like cypress, juniper, palms, and fountain grass. Avoid plants with oils or resins and those that produce lots of dead material.

Fire Resistive Plants

Choose plants that store water in leaves and stems, produce limited dead material, and are non-woody or have open, loose branches.

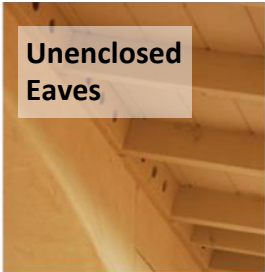


Best Practices for Home Hardening

Flying embers are the cause of up to 90% of homes destroyed by wildfire. Embers can originate from an approaching wildfire or small parts of nearby burning vegetation and building materials.

Making your home less vulnerable to embers will increase the chances that it and the homes around it survive a wildfire.

High Risk



- Single Paned Windows
- Shake or Wood Shingle Roofs
- Loose or Missing Bird Stopping or Roof Flashing
- Unenclosed Rain Gutters

Lower Risk



- Double Paned Windows
- Asphalt, Fiberglass, Clay, Cement, or Other Class A Roofing Materials
- Metal Flashing at Roof to Wall Intersections or Soffit and Slope Intersections
- Enclosed or Screened Rain Gutters

Resources *and* References



The minimum requirements for defensible space in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone are established in the California Code of Regulations 14 CA ADC 1299.03.

Read the law at govt.westlaw.com/calregs



The City of Poway Fire Department provides information on Defensible Space, Defensible Homes, and other Fire Prevention resources, including this guide, on its website.

Read more at poway.org/fireprevention



The City of Poway maintains a Landscape and Irrigation Design Manual that outlines requirements for new development and best practices for existing development in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

Read more at poway.org/landscape-irrigation



The Office of the State Fire Marshal and CAL FIRE are tasked with developing best practices in support of the State's defensible space program.

Read more at readyforwildfire.org



Scan the QR Code with your cell phone camera to visit poway.org/fireprevention

Information in this guide was sourced from CAL FIRE, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Living With Fire Tahoe, the National Fire Protection Association, and the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Become Firewise

Firewise USA is a voluntary program that provides a framework to help neighbors get organized, find direction, and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community. Insurance companies, including the California Fair Plan, recognize a community's Firewise status for rate discounts.

What is a Firewise Community?

A Firewise Community brings neighbors together to assess and collaboratively reduce their risk to wildfire. A committee of volunteers represents the community in developing a wildfire risk assessment and a community action plan. Each year, neighbors complete educational and risk reduction actions identified in the plan.



FIREWISE USA[®]
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

Become Firewise

Speak with your neighbors and build a network of volunteers willing to contribute to the Firewise Community action plan. Not every neighbor has to participate, some communities may only see 20-25% participation.

Reach out to the Poway Neighborhood Emergency Corps and Fire Safe Council to host an informational neighborhood meeting. The Fire Safe Council will assist you in coordinating with the Poway Fire Department and the local CAL FIRE Firewise liaison.

Visit [firewise.org](https://www.firewise.org) to learn more.

Connect with Your Fire Safe Council

The Poway Neighborhood Emergency Corps and Fire Safe Council (PNEC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization focused on disaster preparedness education. As the Poway Fire Safe Council, the group helps residents protect their families and homes from wildfire through education, prevention and community involvement.

PNEC works closely with the Poway Fire Department to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the City of Poway. The CWPP helps identify and prioritize projects to increase the community's resilience to wildfire and can be used as a template for neighborhoods seeking to become Firewise.

PNEC hosts a quarterly educational meeting on wildfire preparedness, risk reduction and other emergency preparedness topics. The annual Emergency and Safety Fair draws hundreds of visitors to booths featuring resources from across the County. The group's goal is to help connect residents through a program of neighbors helping neighbors to build a network that shares emergency preparedness information and supports the more vulnerable individuals in our community.

Connect with the Poway Neighborhood Emergency Corps and Fire Safe Council to learn more about how PNEC supports the community at powaynec.com or follow on Facebook.

*Scan the QR Code
below with your
cell phone camera to
visit powaynec.com*

