



Defensible Space and the Law

CAL FIRE's Guide to Defensible Space Requirements

If you live in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone in the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) you are responsible for ensuring that your property complies with California's building and fire codes that call for homeowners to take proactive steps to protect their property from a wildfire. A person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains a building or structure in, upon, or adjoining a mountainous area, forest-covered lands, shrub-covered lands, grass-covered lands, or land that is covered with flammable material, shall maintain 100 feet of Defensible Space as required by law.

Requirements can be found in Public Resource Code (PRC) § 4291, 14 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 1299.03, Board of Forestry (BOF) General Guidelines, California Fire Code (CFC) § 505.1, California Building Code (CBC) § 2113.9.2. CBC Chapter 7A requires certain construction materials and methods for homes in wildland areas.

Contact your local fire department for additional requirements to ensure your home complies with the state and local requirements. For more information on laws and codes, go to: <https://readyforwildfire.org/fire-safety-laws/>.

Zone 1 Requirements / Within 30 feet of all structures or to the property line:

- Remove all branches within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe outlet, **PRC § 4291(a)(2) and 14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(2)**.
- Remove leaves, pine needles, or other vegetation on roofs, gutters, decks, porches, stairways, etc. **PRC § 4291 (a)(4) and 14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(1)**.
- Remove dead tree or shrub branches that overhang roofs, below or adjacent to windows, or which are adjacent to wall surfaces, **PRC § 4291 (a)(3) and 14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(2)**.
- Remove all dead and dying grass, plants, shrubs, trees, branches, leaves, weeds, and pine needles, **14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(1)**.
- Remove or separate fuels to maintain spacing between vegetation to interrupt the fire's path. Prune limbs; separate plants and ground cover, **PRC § 4291(a)(1) and BOF General Guidelines item 1**.
- Remove flammable vegetation and items that could catch fire which are adjacent to, or under, combustible decks, balconies, and stairs, **14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(4)**.
- Relocate exposed wood piles outside of Zone 1 unless completely covered in a fire-resistant material, **14 CCR § 1299.03(a)(3)**.

Zone 2 Requirements / Within 30–100 feet of all structures or to the property line:

- Cut annual grasses and forbs down to a maximum height of 4 inches, **14 CCR § 1299.03(b)(2)(B)**.
- Remove fuels to create proper horizontal and vertical spacing among shrubs and trees, and remove lower tree limbs, **BOF General Guidelines item 4**.
- All exposed woodpiles must have a minimum of 10 feet clearance, down to bare mineral soil, in all directions, **14 CCR § 1299.03(b)(2)(C)**.
- Remove all dead and dying trees, branches, shrubs, or other plants, and surface debris. Loose surface litter, normally consisting of fallen leaves or needles, twigs, bark, and cones, shall be permitted to a depth of 3 inches, **14 CCR § 1299.03(b)(2)(A)**.

Other Requirements / Within 100 feet of all structures or to the property line:

- Logs or stumps embedded in the soil must be removed or isolated from other vegetation, **BOF General Guidelines item 3**.

- 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, **14 CCR § 1299.03(c)(1)**.
- Address numbers shall be displayed in contrasting colors (4" min. size) and readable from the street or access road, **CFC § 505.1**.
- Equip chimney or stovepipe openings with a metal screen having openings between 3/8 inch and 1/2 inch, **CBC § 2113.9.2**.

Defensible space laws and building codes in California outline the minimum standards. The requirements may vary depending on factors such as proximity to wildland areas, slope steepness, the presence of combustible materials on the property, home hardening measures, and local defensible space ordinances.

Links to Codes and Regulations:

Public Resource Code § 4291

leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=PRC&division=4.&title=&part=2.&chapter=3.&article=

14 California Code of Regulations § 1299.03

[https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I47E4A92E5B4D11EC976B000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)_](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I47E4A92E5B4D11EC976B000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)_)

Board of Forestry General Guidelines

https://bof.fire.ca.gov/media/4mwdav3l/rpc-2-c-defensible-space-guidance-document_ada.pdf

Defensible Space - Related Codes:

14 CCR § 1299.02 - Definitions

a) Defensible space. The buffer that landowners are required to create on their property between a "Building or Structure" and the plants, brush and trees or other items surrounding the "Building or Structure" that could ignite in the event of a fire.

(b) Building or Structure. Anything constructed that is designed or intended for support, enclosure, shelter, or protection of persons, animals, or property, having a permanent roof that is supported by walls or posts that connect to, or rest on the ground.

(c) Outbuilding. Buildings or structures that are less than one hundred-twenty (120) square feet in size and not used for human habitation. For purposes of this Section, an "Outbuilding" is not a "Building or Structure" as defined in subsection (b) above.

PRC 4119 - The department, or its duly authorized agent, shall enforce the state forest and fire laws. The department may inspect all properties, except the interior of dwellings, subject to the state forest and fire laws, for the purpose of ascertaining compliance with such laws.

PRC 4117 - Any county, city, or district may adopt ordinances, rules, or regulations to provide fire prevention restrictions or regulations that are necessary to meet local conditions of weather, vegetation, or other fire hazards. Such ordinances, rules, or regulations may be more restrictive than state statutes in order to meet local fire hazard conditions.

California Civil Code (CVC) 1102.19 - On and after July 1, 2021, a seller of a real property located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone, shall provide to the buyer documentation stating that the property is in compliance with Section 4291 of the PRC. Real Estate Inspection request: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/dspace>

Government Code (GOV) 51182 - A person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains an **occupied dwelling or occupied structure** in, upon, or adjoining a mountainous area, forest-covered land, shrub-covered land, grass-covered land, or land that is covered with flammable material, which area or land is within a very high fire hazard severity zone designated by the local agency pursuant to Section 51179, shall at all times maintain defensible space of 100 feet.

CBC 701A.2 (Chapter 7A) – The purpose of this chapter is to establish minimum standards for the protection of life and property by increasing the ability of a building located in any Fire Hazard Severity Zone within state responsibility areas or any wildland urban interface to resist the end treatment of flames or brain and birth projected by a vegetation fire and contributes to a systematic reduction in conflagration losses.