

FACTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ORDINANCE

Fire is a factor living in the foothills and the Sierra Nevada and the "fire season" of years past, that was limited to a few months, has now grown to encompass nearly the entire calendar year. With the County having a diverse and complex landscape which includes mountains, forests and other brush, or grass covered wildlands which have the potential to fuel a catastrophic fire event, our risk of significant wildfire is no longer bound by the month on a calendar.

Since 2007, there have been three major fires in El Dorado County that have destroyed infrastructure (e.g. Angora Fire, King Fire, Sand Fire). This increased fire activity requires an increase in preventive measures to lower the community's chances of experiencing another large destructive fire.

Most importantly is the protection of lives and property from the threat of fire and the safety of law enforcement and fire personnel during wildfires. The County's vegetation management/defensible space ordinance is one protective strategy.

By studying fire prevention measures in other communities, working with local stakeholders and holding public meetings, the County developed a vegetation management/defensible space ordinance similar to CAL FIRE's defensible space laws. The vegetation management ordinance sets out the rules for an annual requirements for the abatement of the growth and/or accumulation of weeds, grasses, shrubs, dormant brush, hardwood slash, tree limbs, hazardous vegetation and combustible materials on all improved parcels and designated unimproved parcels within the County as well as maintenance of those parcels to prevent vegetation from becoming fuel for destructive fires.

The County, through ongoing education and outreach, is communicating the new ordinance rules to the public. Staff are assisting residents with understanding compliance requirements of the ordinance.

When Did the Ordinance Take Effect and When will it be Enforced?

The ordinance took effect on May 30, 2019. Enforcement begins June 1, 2020. The County will work continually with residents to educate them about the need for defensible space/vegetation management so our communities are safer.

El Dorado County Vegetation Management & Defensible Space Ordinance
Updated: December 5, 2019

Where Does the Ordinance Apply?

The ordinance applies to the unincorporated, State Responsibility Area (SRA) of El Dorado County. Property owners in the incorporated cities of Placerville and South Lake Tahoe should contact their city for questions about defensible space regulations within city limits.

What Is Defensible Space?

Defensible Space is the area around a structure where hazardous vegetation and combustible materials have been cleared, reduced or replaced. This space acts as a barrier between an advancing fire and a structure.

How Large Must the Defensible Space Be?

The ordinance requires that hazardous vegetation and combustible materials that can spread fire be cleared, reduced or replaced a minimum distance of 100-feet from each side of any structure. Local fire agencies, insurance companies, and homeowners associations, etc. may require the clearance of additional vegetation.

How is Defensible Space Maintained?

- Creating and maintaining effective defensible space is an ongoing process. Actions required to achieve defensible space include:
 - Remove all dead plants, grass, and weeds.
 - Remove dead or dry leaves, and pine needles from your yard, roof and rain gutters.
 - Keep tree branches 10 feet away from your chimney and other trees.
 - Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of four inches.
 - Create horizontal spacing between shrubs, and trees.
 - Create vertical spacing between grass, shrubs, and trees, to eliminate potential fuel ladders.
 - Do not completely remove all vegetation which would leave the ground bare. Some vegetation is necessary to prevent erosion. When native vegetation is completely removed for fire control, the bare soil is particularly vulnerable to soil erosion.
 - Do not remove or disturb the existing plant root system to prevent any future erosion.
 - Use equipment properly to prevent sparking a wildfire.
 - Mow before 10 a.m. and never on a hot or windy day. String trimmers are a safer option for clearing vegetation.
 - Comply with all El Dorado County Air Quality Management District (AQMD) burn regulation requirements. For more information, visit:
[https://edcgov.us/Government/AirQualityManagement/Pages/burn_information_\(outdoor\).aspx](https://edcgov.us/Government/AirQualityManagement/Pages/burn_information_(outdoor).aspx)

What is the “Good Neighbor and Neighborhood Protection Policy” in the ordinance?

Neighbors, neighborhoods, and communities working together help create unified defensible space.

A neighboring property owner may be required to clear space if the structure or building is within 100 feet of the property line. For example, a structure could be within 70 feet of its property line. The adjacent property owner shall assist its neighbor by completing fuels management on another 30 feet to create a 100 foot strip of treated land. The adjacent property can be an improved parcel or an unimproved parcel (vacant) parcel. It is recommended that neighbors reach out to neighboring property owners to coordinate defensible space efforts, including right of entry agreements on neighboring parcels to achieve defensible space.

Do Trees have to be Removed?

Dead or dying trees constitute a fire hazard and should be removed. Large, healthy trees may remain, as long as they are limbed to an appropriate height above the ground or to an appropriate height above the vegetation growing underneath the branch canopy.

How Much Vertical Spacing is Needed?

Dead and/or dying trees should be removed.

If there is no vegetation underneath, the space from the ground to the lower branches of the tree should generally be in the 6 to 15 foot range depending on slope and other factors. This eliminates a vertical “fire ladder.”

It is recommended that a distance of 3 times the height of a shrub be from the lowest branches of a tree.

How Much Horizontal Spacing is Needed?

Dead and/or dying trees should be removed.

A horizontal clearance of between 4-40 feet is generally recommended, depending on the slope and type of vegetation.

What are the Defensible Space Requirements for a Continuous Tree Canopy?

To achieve defensible space while retaining a stand of larger trees with a continuous tree canopy, apply the following treatments:

Remove all surface fuels greater than four inches in height. Single specimens of trees or other vegetation may be retained provided they are adequately-spaced, well-pruned, and create a condition that avoids spread of fire to other vegetation or to a building or structure.

Remove lower limbs of trees ("prune") to at least six feet up to 15 feet (or the lower 1/3 branches for small trees). Properties with greater fire hazards, such as steeper slopes or more severe fire danger, will require pruning heights in the upper end of this range.

When Enforcement Begins, Will the County Fine and/or Abate (Clean) Properties?

The goal of the Defensible Space and Vegetation Management Ordinance is to create a safer and fire adapted El Dorado County. If the County does not see progress over a reasonable period of time, it has the ability to abate (clean) a property and place a lien on the property for the cost of the abatement.