

# Defensible Space Checklist for Existing Homes in Forested Areas

## House Zone – within 5 feet (minimum) of dwellings

- 1- Clean roof and gutters before fire season begins, and keep clear during fire season.
  - 2- Remove all leaves, pine needles, and other dead organic materials before fire season begins.
  - 3- Remove trees and shrubs from this area. Plant only water-loving, low-height plants if you will keep them clear of bark mulch and dead debris during fire season.
  - 4- Do not store flammable items under elevated decks during fire season.
  - 5- Clean out all organic materials under low-profile decks every Spring, or install 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch mesh or solid sheeting around these decks, from deck to ground (One time).
  - 6- Remove all tree limbs within 10 feet of the chimney cap, and all branches above this area.
  - Provide screening for chimney caps (1/2 inch maximum). (One Time)
  - Install concrete, stone, or gravel, in this zone. (One time)
  - Eliminate any wood or plastic fence connections to the dwelling. (One time)
  - Medium Priority - Remove all tree limbs that are less than 20 feet above the roofs of dwellings.
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## Intermediate Zone – 5 to 30 feet from dwellings

- 1- Remove most dead leaves and pine needles, and remove all dead branches, at least 15 feet high, before fire season begins.
- 2- Keep all wood piles at least 20 feet away from dwellings during fire season.
- 3- Keep lawns and annual plants mowed to a height of 4 inches or less during fire season.
- 4- Remove plants under evergreen trees that may act as flame ladders. Flames from evergreens may be 3 times their height, and 2 times for deciduous plants.
- 5- Small evergreen trees, or clusters, should be removed until they are at least 10 feet apart.
- 6- Remove all branches from the lower third of all evergreens, up to 10 feet high.
- 7- Clear all flammable materials for at least 10 feet around large (100+ gallons) propane tanks.
- 8- Water all plants in this zone, as needed, during the fire season.
- 9- Remove vegetation adjacent to sheds and outbuildings (5 feet minimum).
- Medium Priority - Space evergreen trees to have 18 feet between crowns, or remove all dead limbs.
- Low Priority - Create fuel breaks with driveways, walkways, and patios. (One time)
- Low Priority - Consider removal for large evergreen trees with branches within 10 feet of dwellings.
- Low Priority – Move large propane tanks so they are at least 30 feet from dwellings. **See Page 2.**

## Outer Zone – 30 to 100 feet from dwellings

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1-Eliminate leaf and branch piles over 6 inches high before fire season begins. Pine needle layers should not exceed 3 inches in depth.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 2-Remove all dead trees and brush, and all dead branches to at least 10 feet high.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 3-Remove vegetation that is adjacent to sheds and outbuildings (5 feet minimum).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 4-Driveways must be at least 10 feet wide, with at least 2 feet clear of vegetation on each side. Fuel must also be reduced within 10 feet of the driveway. Vertical clearance of 15 feet must be provided.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Medium Priority - Remove plants under evergreen trees that may act as flame ladders (3X, 2X).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Medium Priority – Small evergreen trees should be removed until they are at least 10 feet apart.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Low Priority - Provide 12 feet between evergreen canopies, from 30 to 60 feet from dwellings.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Low Priority - Provide 6 feet between evergreen canopies, from 60 to 100 feet from dwellings.
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## General Notes

- 1-All items are considered High priority, at least during fire season, except those that are noted as Low or Medium priority.
- 2-For slopes below a dwelling, provide fuel reduction from 100 to 200, 300, or 400 feet, depending on the steepness. This area should include removal of all dead branches to at least 6 feet high, dead brush, and most dead trees, and the elimination of any thickets of small live trees and brush. Clearing all of your property to this level should be considered.
- 3-Consider permanently marking the limits of the 30 and 100-foot zones around your dwellings.
- 4-If the outer zone extends beyond your property lines, contact the adjacent owners and try to come to an agreement.
- 5-Evergreen trees, big and small, burn with much bigger flames than deciduous plants and trees. Small cedar trees are the most flammable. All dead branches should still be removed from deciduous plants and trees, to at least 10 feet from the ground.
- 6-Many groundcovers, annuals, and deciduous plants, when irrigated and maintained, are less flammable than most wood buildings and decks.
- 7-Fire Season begins when outdoor burning is no longer allowed, usually in May or June, and ends when frequent rains begin, usually in October or November.
- 8-This checklist is my interpretation of the 2018 glossy flyer produced by the National Fire Protection Association, and other guidelines, and it is most applicable to forested areas with very little seasonal grass under the trees. I live on the west slope of the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains, at 3600-foot elevation.

March 27, 2019 edition Jim Brake