Oakland Firesafe Council

DEFENSIBLE SPACE & LANDSCAPING FOR FIRE SAFETY - FIRESCAPING
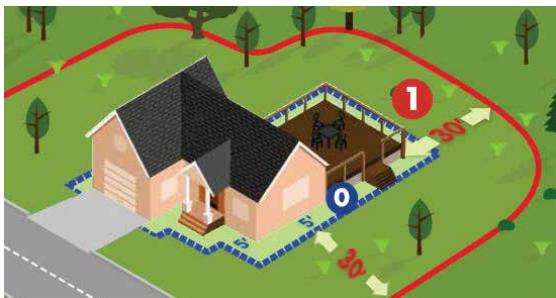
Creating defensible space and following fire-smart landscaping (Firescaping) principles will greatly improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. The overall approach is aimed at the **reduction and separation of combustibles** in order to protect structures from embers, radiant heat and direct flames. These steps should also include implementing home hardening measures: **Guide #09 – Home Hardening for Wildfire**

Defensible space strategy **creates a buffer** between buildings and surrounding grass, shrub, trees or wildland area. In addition to helping slow or stop the spread of wildfire, it also provides a **safer place for firefighters** to defend the property and allows more time for **evacuation**.

ZONE 0
NO COMBUSTIBLES

Zone 0 extends from 0' - 5' around your house and is the **most critical area** to ensure that no combustible materials are present. Remove all fire hazards in this space!

- ❖ No combustible materials within 5' of any building or deck
- ❖ Replace jute or natural fiber doormats with heavy rubber or metal grates, remove/replace combustible outdoor furniture
- ❖ Use crushed stone, gravel or dirt instead of bark mulch
- ❖ Replace wood fences in Zone 0 with metal, brick, stone, etc.
- ❖ Remove flammable materials on and underneath decks, patios or porches
- ❖ Remove tree limbs that extend into Zone 0 and that hang over the roof or chimney closer than 10'
- ❖ Remove dry leaves and debris from the roof and rain gutters

ZONE 1
LEAN, CLEAN, & GREEN

Zone 1 extends approximately 5' - 30' out from buildings, decks and other structures. Maintain this area to be as fire-resistant as possible **throughout the year**!

- ❖ Remove all dead plants, grass and weeds
- ❖ Remove fire-prone vegetation and landscape using firescaping guidelines: **Guide #14 – Fire-Smart Planting**
- ❖ Limb tree branches 6' or more up from ground level and 10' away from other trees and flammables
- ❖ Create a separation between vegetation and items that can catch fire, such as patio furniture, sheds and play areas
- ❖ Cut or mow grasses and weeds down to a maximum height of 4 inches

BEYOND ZONE 1
REDUCED-FUEL AREA

Many sources recommend creating a defensible zone 30' - 100' away from structures, but in urban and residential areas this may not be possible. **Do all you can** within the boundaries of your property.

- ❖ Space trees apart depending on the ground slope, from 10' minimum on flat ground to 30' minimum on steep slopes
- ❖ Remove fallen leaves, needles, cones and small branches that are deeper than 3 inches on the ground
- ❖ Ensure that vegetation adjacent to roads and driveways is maintained in the same manner as Zone 1, and **keep roads firesafe for evacuation and first responder access**
- ❖ Work with your neighbors to reduce combustibles along your property lines
- ❖ Maintain your property year-round

DESIGN YOUR LANDSCAPE FOR FIRE SAFETY

FIRESCAPING is landscape design that reduces house and property vulnerability to wildfire. A carefully Firescaped design will **reduce the chance of ignition**, lower a fire's intensity and slow the spread of fire – all to help your home survive and to give you more time to safely escape if necessary.

CREATE your landscaping plan with plants and elements that provide the best possible fire protection. Use non-flammable hardscaping such as rocks, bricks or pavers. Include open areas to provide a buffer to help prevent flames spreading. Understand that **fire-smart plant selection is influenced by multiple factors** (**Guide #14 – Fire-Smart Planting**). Simple landscaping features that protect from flying embers, heat and flames can significantly improve your home's ability to survive a wildfire.

OTHER FIRESCAPING TECHNIQUES that help increase fire safety on your property include:

❖ Create **fuel breaks** with walkways, driveways, patios, islands, etc.

❖ Construct fences with **non-flammable materials** such as brick, rocks, metal or concrete

❖ Use a drip irrigation system tailored to individual plant's needs to **keep plants healthy** during the dry season and to save water

❖ Use a fire-resistant compost, mulch or thick bark to **maintain moisture** in the soil
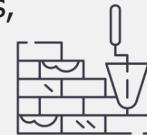
PLANNING & MAINTENANCE are the two key factors in creating a fire-smart landscape.

MAINTAIN YOUR PROPERTY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

PRUNING – As vegetation grows, the spacing between plants, bushes and trees is reduced. Regular pruning helps **maintain spacing and removes the dead foliage** that enables even a fire-resistant plant to burn. Larger bushes and shrubs should be pruned up to reduce the chance that they can become ladder-fuels for trees and structures.

RAKE & CLEAN – Many bushes and trees drop their leaves regularly, especially in the fall when the fire season is at its peak. Rake and clean the ground as often as needed, and **pay special attention to the area in Zone 0** to keep it free of leaf litter and dry plant debris.

WHEN USING POWER TOOLS such as weed-whackers, chain saws and lawn mowers, be very careful not to create sparks or spill fuel, which can start a fire. Make sure that these machines are maintained properly and that exhaust spark-arrestors are installed. Always use caution and **never use power tools during Red Flag Warning** days!

TACKLE VEGETATION ISSUES AS A COMMUNITY

REMEMBER your community is only as firesafe as its least properly maintained area.

❖ Consider Oakland's **Adopt-a-Spot** program to work on City lots that aren't maintained: **oaklandca.gov/services/apply-for-adopt-a-spot-online**

❖ If a resident is unable to work on their own property, you can come together as neighbors and create a **Firewise USA® community** to help everyone be more firesafe: **Guide #12 – Firewise USA®**

❖ If funds are needed to tackle large vegetation issues or to haul away debris, ask Oakland Firesafe Council about possible matching grants.

Visit OFSC's Firescaping page for more info and in-depth resources
oaklandfiresafecouncil.org/programs/#firescaping