

North Whidbey Fire & Rescue

Wildland fire risk reduction

Preparing Homes for Wildfire:

Vegetation Management, Defensible Space & Home Hardening Program

Vegetation Management:

Defensible space, coupled with home hardening, is essential to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. Defensible space is the buffer you create between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area surrounding it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it helps protect your home from catching fire either from embers, direct flame contact, or radiant heat. Proper defensible space also provides firefighter's a safe area to work in, to defend your home.

Defensible Space Zones:

Zone 0 – Ember-Resistant Zone

Zone 0 extends 5 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc.

Science has proven it to be the most important of all the defensible space zones. This zone includes the area under and around all attached decks and requires the most stringent wildfire fuel reduction. The ember-resistant zone is designed to keep fire or embers from igniting materials that can spread the fire to your home. The following provides guidance for this zone:

- Use hardscape materials like gravel, pavers, concrete, and other non-combustible mulch materials; do not use combustible bark or mulch.
- Remove all dead and dying weeds, grass, plants, shrubs, trees, branches, and vegetative debris (leaves, needles, cones, bark, etc.); check your roofs, gutters, decks, porches, stairways, etc.
- Remove all branches within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe outlet.
- Limit plants in this area to low-growing, nonwoody, adequately watered, and maintained plants.
- Limit combustible items (outdoor furniture, planters, etc.) on top of decks.
- Relocate firewood and lumber to Zone 2.
- Replace combustible fencing, gates, and arbors attached to the home with non-combustible alternatives.

- Consider relocating garbage and recycling containers outside this zone.
- Consider relocating boats, RVs, vehicles, and other combustible items outside this zone.

Zone 1 – Lean, Clean, and Green Zone

Zone 1 extends 30 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Remove all dead plants, grass, and weeds (vegetation).
- Remove dead or dry leaves and pine needles from your yard, roof, and rain gutters.
- Remove branches that hang over your roof and keep dead branches 10 feet away from your chimney.
- Trim trees regularly to keep branches at least 10 feet from other trees.
- Relocate wood piles to Zone 2.
- Remove or prune flammable plants and shrubs near windows.
- Remove vegetation and items that could catch fire from around and under decks, balconies, and stairs.
- Separate trees, shrubs, and items that could catch fire, such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets, etc.

Zone 2 – Reduce Fuel Zone

Zone 2 extends from 30 feet to 100 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc., or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of 4 inches.
- Create horizontal space between shrubs and trees. (See diagram)
- Create vertical space between grass, shrubs, and trees. (See diagram)
- Remove fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches. However, they may be permitted to a depth of 3 inches.
- All exposed wood piles must have a minimum of 10 feet of clearance in all directions, down to bare mineral soil.

Zone 1 and 2

- “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.

Conclusion:

The impact of wildland fire within the North Whidbey Fire & Rescue district during peak fire season can harm community members. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) incorporates residential and commercial structures within wildland vegetation ecosystems. As demographics increase with expansion into the wildland-urban interface, the potential for vegetation fires increases as well. North Whidbey Fire & Rescue promotes a Defensible Space & Home Hardening Program to preserve life, property, and the environment. This will allow our resources to protect residential and commercial structures better while providing and maintaining firefighter safety.