

Defensible space is the area around a structure that creates a buffer intended to stop or slow the spread of flames, reduce exposure to radiant heat, limit flammable materials where an ember could land and start a fire, and in the event of a fire, provide space for emergency responders to safely conduct fire suppression operations. This area must be diligently managed in order to maintain it in a fire-resistant condition. *Homes with effective defensible space are much more likely to survive a wildfire.*

The size and shape of your defensible space depends on the home's location and property boundaries, topography, surrounding vegetation, and other factors. Consider the zone approach: Zone 1 serves as a critical buffer immediately around the home, including attached decks, garages, and trees next to the house that you wish to incorporate. Ideally, Zone 1 extends at least 30 feet from the perimeter of the home, or to your property boundaries if you have a small lot. Zone 2 is a secondary buffer and extends out from Zone 1, usually an additional 70 feet or to property lines. When structures are located on a steep hill or at the edge of a ridge or bluff, increase the downslope Zone 2 distance up to 200 feet from the home. If your property boundaries do not allow for a Zone 2, then Zone 1 will extend to your property line. Property management activities are always limited to your property boundaries.

Nothing you can do will guarantee your home will make it through a wildfire. Under the most extreme conditions, any home can be destroyed. But what you do before wildfire threatens can dramatically improve the odds that your home will survive. **Creating defensible space isn't an option. It's a necessity.**

For more information contact the City of Austin - WPD: **512-974-2550**

# MAINTAIN *a* DEFENSIBLE SPACE



## Zone One (Lean, Clean, Green Zone)

- A** A Firewise® property starts with the structure and moves outward. A home constructed with fire resistant building materials should always be considered the primary method of protecting the structure from fire.
- B** Water lawn, plants, and trees regularly (as allowed by watering restrictions) to ensure that they are healthy, especially during fire season. Mow the lawn regularly.
- C** Remove dead, dying, or dry vegetation, leaf litter, and other debris from yard, roof surfaces, gutters, and other locations where it accumulates.
- D** If you have big beautiful shade trees you want to keep, you can incorporate them into your home's footprint. Then, defensible space will extend around your home and those chosen trees. Prune trees so the lowest limbs are at least 6 feet from the ground, and limbs have adequate clearance from structures.
- E** Eliminate ladder fuels and accumulations of woody debris. Remove dense understory layers and thin tree canopies. Prune trees so the lowest limbs are at least 6 feet from the ground.
- F** Plants in Zone 1 should be carefully spaced, mostly low-growing, and low in resins, oils and waxes that burn easily.

- G** Within the first 3 feet of the home, use nonflammable landscaping materials, such as rock and pavers. If plants are desired in this space, choose perennial plants with high-moisture content.
- H** Add protection with "fuel breaks," such as driveways, gravel walkways and healthy lawns.
- I** Consider using nonflammable material for fencing, at least for the sections of fence that connect to your home.
- J** Clearly mark septic tank locations. The weight of fire trucks can collapse them, immobilize the truck, and endanger personnel.
- K** Identify your home and neighborhood with clear and easily readable street names and numbers.

## Zone Two (Reduced Fuel Zone)

- L** This area should be thinned out as well, though less space between potential fuels is needed than in Zone 1.
- M** Create separation between low-level vegetation and tree branches by removing ladder fuels, reducing the height of low-level vegetation, and/or trimming low tree branches.
- N** Don't allow grass and other surface fuels to become overgrown in Zone 2. Typically, surface vegetation in this area should be maintained at a height no greater than 4 inches.
- O** Locate any propane tanks, firewood stacks, brush piles, and snags in Zone 2, at least 30 feet from the home.
- P** Collaborate with your neighbors for a more effective, community-based approach to wildfire protection.
- Q** Preserve natural vegetation along creeks, streams, and rivers. The higher moisture content of riparian corridors reduces fire intensity and can serve as a fire break.
- R** Provide adequate emergency vehicle access by maintaining a driveway clearance of at least 20 feet wide by 13 feet 6 inches high, with pullouts every 400 feet.

Original graphic provided by CAL FIRE

