



# NEWPORT BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Fire Chief

DATE: November 14, 2018  
TO: Grace Leung, City Manager  
FROM: Chip Duncan, Fire Chief

**SUBJECT: MANAGEMENT OF WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE AGAINST FIRE THREAT**

Due to the devastating fires in Ventura and Los Angeles County and Northern California, the Newport Beach Fire Department has been fielding calls from concerned residents about the fire safety of their homes. Residents that abut wildland urban interface (WUI) areas in Buck Gully and Newport Coast are particularly concerned about vegetation management in their respective areas. The fire department is very aware of the challenges presented by the vegetation in our wildland urban interface areas. Our prevention division regularly inspects our fuel management zones (FMZ) to ensure they are compliant with the code. Private properties that are not compliant are cited and we vigorously pursue follow up to ensure the properties become compliant.

It has been approximately 12 years since the ordinance involving fuel management was reviewed. At that time, significant concerns were expressed by residents in Buck Gully opposed to a more aggressive vegetation management. Since that time, fire conditions and weather have worsened throughout California. Therefore, our new Fire Marshal will be tasked with reviewing the ordinance and making recommendations for improving fire safety related to vegetation management.

Additionally, many of our residents have questions about fuel management. Below is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) related to vegetation management in Newport Beach. If you would like any further information on how to protect your family and property from wildfires, please contact the Newport Beach Fire Department at (949) 644-3104.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between a Hazard Reduction Zone and a Fuel Modification Zone?

Both are designed to reduce the amount of combustible fuel, which in turn reduces the amount of heat, associated flame lengths, and the intensity of a fire that may threaten a structure.

#### **Hazard Reduction Zones**

Hazard Reduction Zones are typically located in Buck Gully, Morning Canyon, and parts of Big Canyon.

A hazard reduction zone extends out from the part of the structure that faces the wildland area to 100 feet, or to the property line if the property line is closer than 100 feet.

The City's standard for hazard reduction includes requirements for maintaining existing trees, shrubs, and ground cover in this 100-foot setback zone. Dead or dying foliage shall be removed as well as dead trees, shrubs, and ground cover. Roofs shall be cleared of leaves, needles, twigs, and other combustible materials. Chimneys shall be equipped with an approved spark arrester.

Existing trees are not required to have a separation of tree canopies but new trees shall be planted such that mature canopies will have a minimum separation of ten feet. The lowest tree branch shall be at least three times as high as the shrub when a shrub is located within the dripline of a tree.

The City has a Fire Resistive Plant List which lists trees, bushes, shrubs, and ground cover that will slow the progress and intensity of a wildfire and not contribute to the fire load. In hazard reduction areas, any new plant materials must be from this approved plant list. This requirement applies only to those areas of the property which face the hazardous fire area.

In addition, every property located within 100 feet of a hazardous fire area is required to maintain a three-foot wide clear path for ingress and egress on each side of the structure for fire department access in a fire. Trash containers are excepted if they can be easily moved.

#### **Fuel Modification Zones**

Fuel Modification Zones (FMZ) are typically located in the Newport Coast communities. The requirements for fuel modification zones are imposed when a new community or development is proposed next to a wildland area, and are defined as:

A ribbon of land surrounding homes designed to diminish the intensity of a wildfire as it approaches the homes. A fuel modification zone differs from a hazard

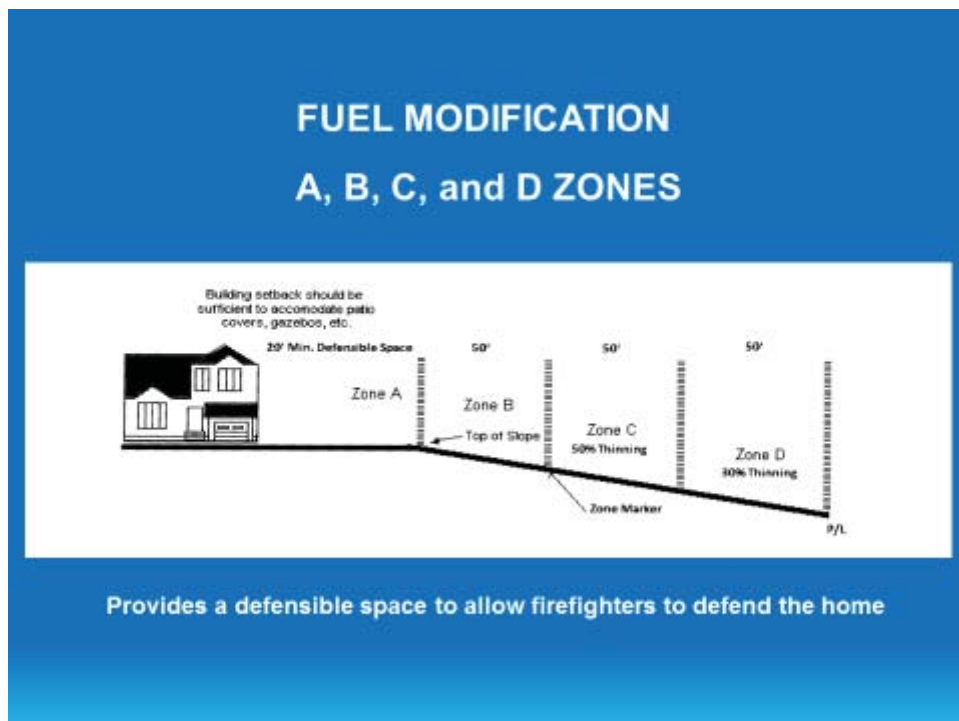
reduction zone through a combination of methodologies, including the removal of native vegetation and replacing it with fire resistive plant species, as well as the reduction in the amount of native combustible vegetation. The minimum width of a fuel modification zone is 170 feet. These areas may be owned by individual property owners or by a homeowner's association. In the case of Newport Coast, local homeowner's associations own the majority of the fuel modification areas.

This ribbon of land is most often divided into four zones. The four zones are referred to as the A, B, C, and D zones.

The **A zone** is closest to the homes and is most often the last twenty feet of the back yard of the private residences. The A zone is the defensible space where firefighters will set up hose lines to extinguish the approaching fire. The A zone includes ornamental plants and single specimen trees. All plants in this area are required to be irrigated and must be from the approved plant list.

The **B zone** is the next 50 feet just outside the back fence line. This zone is an area where natural vegetation has been replaced by fire resistive, drought tolerant plants from an approved list. This B zone is permanently, automatically irrigated. Non-approved vegetation must be removed in this zone.

The **C and D Zones** are the next 100 feet away from the homes. Each zone is a minimum of 50 feet in width. These zones are called the thinning zones. Natural vegetation is reduced to 50% in the C zone. In the D zone a thinning of 30% of natural vegetation occurs. A way to imagine the thinning principle is in the 50% thinning zone (C zone) two people can walk around clumps of vegetation side by side. In a 30% thinning zone (D zone) two people would have to walk single file between clumps of natural vegetation.



Certain fire prone species of vegetation are required to be removed when found in any of the four fuel modification zones. In all zones any dead or dying material is removed and no combustible construction is allowed in the A, B, C, or D zones.

In addition to reduction of the vegetation hazards, areas regulated by the City's fuel modification requirements are also required to "harden" the structures immediately adjacent to the wildland area. This "hardening" is done by providing automatic fire sprinkler protection, installation of class "A" roof assemblies, installation of dual glazed windows, fire resistive construction, and the elimination of any combustible exterior structural elements (for example, wood patio covers).

**2. If a fuel modification zone would protect my home better than a hazard reduction zone, why doesn't the City require it, instead of a hazard reduction zone?**

Owners of properties that are in a designated hazard reduction zone must convert their property to a fuel modification zone if they elect to build a new home or propose a significant remodel that is increased in size by 2,000 square feet or more and exceeds 50% of the area of the existing structure. While the municipal codes for vegetation management are minimal, all property owners are encouraged to be proactive and do whatever they can to protect their home from a wildfire.



**3. I live on Buck Gully and I removed large trees and bushes to protect my home from a wildfire, but my neighbors have very large trees and bushes on their property. Why can't you make them remove them?**

When the municipal code for hazard reduction was written and approved, there were a large number of residents that wanted to keep their existing vegetation, including trees. The City and the residents met, and a compromise was agreed to that would let them keep existing trees that did not comply with the new proposed standards until a new home, or a significant remodel, was built, then it would convert to a fuel modification zone. If you do elect to remove vegetation on a hillside, groundcover species from the fire resistive plant list should be used to prevent erosion.

**4. How often do the hazard reduction zones and fuel modification zones get inspected?**

Hazard reduction zones get inspected every other year. For example, Buck Gully is inspected during even numbered years and Morning Canyon is inspected during odd numbered years.

Fuel modification zones in Newport Coast are inspected twice a year, in the spring and in the fall.

**5. How do you know if someone has planted new trees or plants in a hazard reduction zone that are not allowed to be there?**

We have CAD drawings of all of the vegetation located in the 100-foot zone for each property. During the inspection, the CAD drawings are compared to what is actually on the property. Any changes to the vegetation in the 100-foot zone is noted, including non-compliant vegetation.

**6. How does the hazard reduction zone inspection process work? What happens if I don't do anything?**

We send a "Pre-Inspection Notice" as a courtesy to property owners a minimum of 30 days before the actual inspection. The courtesy letter informs the property owner of the approximate day that their property will be inspected and provides a web link to the hazard reduction guidelines. The courtesy letter also notifies the property owner that they can make an appointment with the inspector if they wish to be present during the inspection.

If the property is deemed non-compliant after the first inspection, a "30-day non-compliant" letter is sent to the property owner, allowing 30 days to bring the property into compliance. The 30-day letter includes a CAD drawing, a list of all of the vegetation noted on the CAD drawing, and a list of "Prescriptions" outlining what needs to be done.

After 30 days, a second inspection is conducted. If the property is still deemed non-compliant, a "Notice of Intent to Abate" letter is sent allowing the property owner 10

days to bring the property into compliance. Since there are no more scheduled inspections, it is important to note that the letter states the property owner is required to schedule an inspection within the 10-day period, otherwise we will assume that no work has been done and a citation will be issued.

## **7. Where can I access the guidelines for vegetation management?**

The guidelines can be accessed on the City website. Below are links to the most common ones:

Hazard Reduction Zones:

<http://www.newportbeachca.gov/home/showdocument?id=18258>

Fuel Modification Zones:

<http://www.newportbeachca.gov/home/showdocument?id=18396>

Converting from a Hazard Reduction Zone to a Fuel Modification Zone:

<http://www.newportbeachca.gov/home/showdocument?id=41892>

Construction Requirements for Special Fire Protection Areas:

<http://www.newportbeachca.gov/home/showdocument?id=18541>

Fire Resistant and Undesirable Plant Lists:

<http://newportbeachca.gov/government/departments/fire-department/life-safety-services-division/wildland-urban-interface/fire-resistant-plant-list>

## **8. Are there any additional recommendations on how I can protect my home from a wildfire?**

1. Regularly clean roof and gutters.
2. Rake away leaves, dead limbs, and twigs. Clear all flammable vegetation.
3. Remove leaves and rubbish from under structures.
4. Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns, and remove limbs within 10 feet of the ground.
5. Remove dead branches that extend over the roof.
6. Prune tree branches and shrubs within 10 feet of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.
7. Remove vines from the walls of the home.
8. Mow grass regularly.
9. Clear a 10-foot area around propane tanks and the barbecue. Place a screen over the grill - use non-flammable material with mesh no coarser than one-quarter inch.
10. Place stove, fireplace, and grill ashes in a metal bucket and soak in water for two days before disposing of.

11. Store gasoline, oily rags, and other flammable materials in approved safety cans. Place cans in a safe location away from the base of buildings.

12. Keep a ladder that will reach the roof.

13. Select materials and plants that can help resist fire rather than fuel it. list is available here:

<http://newportbeachca.gov/government/departments/fire-department/life-safety-services-division/wildland-urban-interface/fire-resistant-plant-list>

14. Keep household items handy that can be used as fire tools: a rake, ax, hand-saw or chain-saw, bucket, shovel, and hoses that reach all areas of the property. You may need to fight small fires before emergency responders arrive. Having this equipment will make your efforts more effective.