



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Brush Management Regulations

BULLETIN #1:
BRUSH MANAGEMENT GUIDE

The City of San Diego has over 900 linear miles of wildland-urban interface, where the back yards of homes meet the native-naturalized vegetation in canyons and other open space areas. Years of drought have increased the flammability of vegetation. During certain times of the year, vegetation can pose a wildfire risk and requires proper management to prevent future tragedies. This Bulletin describes actions you and your family should take to reduce your chances of being affected if a wildfire ever occurs near you.

SAN DIEGO'S UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT

San Diego's semi-arid natural environment contains drought tolerant brush called coastal sage scrub or chaparral, which is home to many rare and endangered plants and animals. In fact, San Diego has more sensitive species than anywhere in the continental United States. Dangerous wildfires can occur in this environment. Fire becomes a potential problem where there are homes located next to dense stands of native or naturalized vegetation. But, you can create a defensible space around your home that can slow the fire down, giving firefighters crucial time and space to protect your home.

CREATING "DEFENSIBLE SPACE"

Defensible Space is the landscape between your house and the potential fuel source (dense stands of native or naturalized vegetation) that is your responsibility as a homeowner to maintain to reduce fire risk. The City's Municipal Code* regulates brush management and creates two Brush Management Zones with different requirements. The Code was amended in October 2005 to make these Zones total 100 feet of defensible space from the structure. (However, your property may be governed by a previous entitlement requiring different zone widths. If in doubt, check with the Fire-Rescue Department or Development Services Department *before* you begin your work!)

Brush Management Zone 1 is typically 35 feet from the structure on the level portion of your property next to your house.

ZONE 1:

- ✓ Generally must be permanently irrigated to maintain succulent growth.
- ✓ Shall consist primarily of low-growing plant material, less than 4 feet in height with the exception of trees. Plants shall be low-fuel and fire-resistant.
- ✓ All portions of trees, other than the trunk, which extend within ten feet of a structure or the outlet of any chimney must be cut back.
- ✓ Trees adjacent to or overhanging any building must be free of dead wood.
- ✓ Roof and rain gutters of any structure must be free of leaves, needles, or other dead vegetative growth.
- ✓ Buildings or conditions legally in existence at the time of the adoption of the Brush Management Regulations as amended in 2005 (including habitable structures, accessory buildings, and other structures such as fences, gazebos, and decks) are allowed to have their use or occupancy continued. However, such use or occupancy must not constitute a distinct danger to life or property. New construction of non-habitable structures such as fences,



gazebos, and decks must be non-combustible and/or have a minimum 1-hour fire resistance rating.

- ✓ Irrigation from Zone 1 must not run into Zone 2 as it encourages growth of flammable vegetation.

Brush Management Zone 2 is the remaining 65 feet that extends beyond Zone 1 and is usually comprised of native and/or naturalized vegetation.

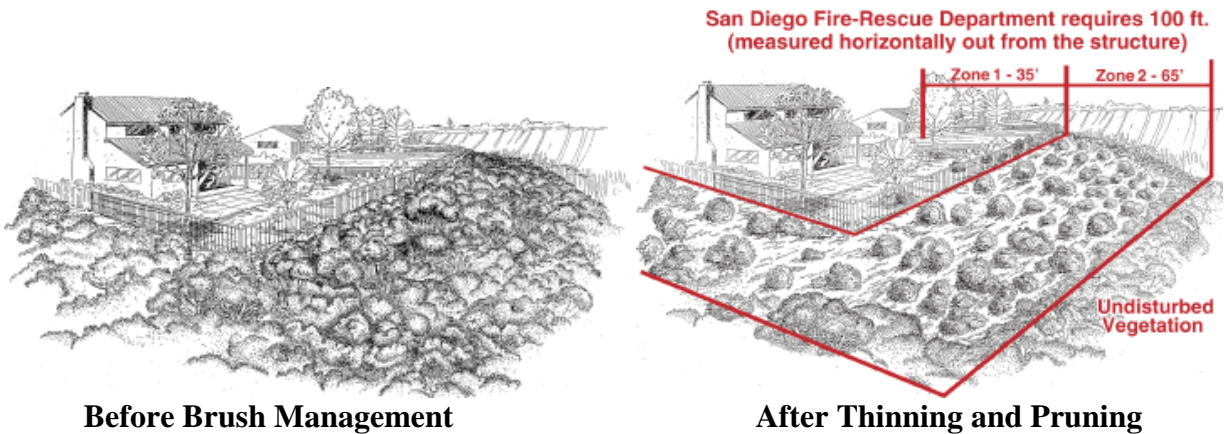
ZONE 2:

- ✓ Can have NO permanent irrigation.
- ✓ Must be thinned and pruned on a seasonal basis to reduce the fuel-load of vegetation greater than 24 inches in height without harming native plants, soil or habitats, as described below.

HOW TO THIN AND PRUNE BRUSH IN ZONE 2

Step 1: Remove.... as much dead wood/vegetation as you can and invasive species within the Brush Management Zone areas.

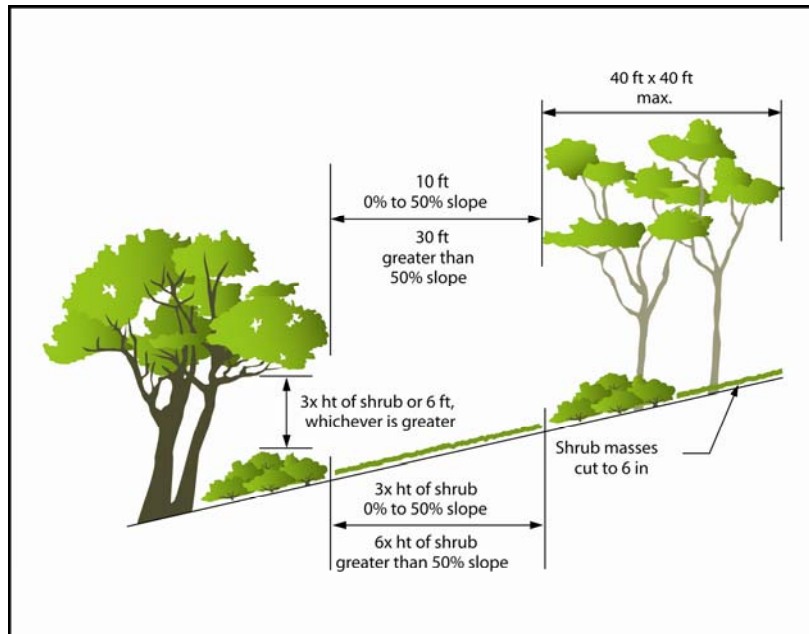
Step 2: Thin.... the entire Zone 2 area. Start by cutting down 50% of the plants over 2 feet in height to a height of 6 inches. Don't go any lower than 6 inches so the roots remain to control soil erosion. The goal is to create a "mosaic" or more natural look, as shown below, so do your cutting in a "staggered" pattern. Leave uncut brush in groupings up to 400 square feet — that's a 20x20-foot area, or an area that can be encircled by an 80-foot rope — separated by groupings of plants cut down to 6 inches. Thinning should be prioritized as follows: 1) invasive non-native species, 2) non-native species, 3) flammable native species, 4) native species, and 5) regionally sensitive species.



Before Brush Management

After Thinning and Pruning

Step 3: Prune.... all plants or plant groupings that are left after the thinning process to achieve the horizontal and vertical clearances shown in the illustration below. (For trees in Eucalyptus Woodland areas, see FPB Policy B-08-1)



Tree and Shrub Spacing

Remaining plants, 4-ft or more in height, should then be cut and shaped into “umbrellas.” This means pruning one half of the lower branches to create umbrella-shaped canopies. This allows you to see and deal with what is growing underneath. Upper branches may then be shortened to reduce fuel load as long as the canopy is left intact. This keeps the plant healthy, and the shade from the plant canopy reduces weed and plant growth underneath. Non-woody vegetation that is under 4 feet in height, like coastal sage scrub, should be cut back to within 12 inches of the root crown.



Chaparral Plant Before Pruning



Chaparral Plant After Pruning

Step 4: Dispose.... of the cuttings and dead wood by either hauling it to a landfill; or, by chipping/mulching it on-site and spreading it out in the Zone 2 area to a depth of not more than 6 inches.

Step 5: Thin & Prune annually.... because plants will grow back.

NOTE: Brush management activities are prohibited within coastal sage scrub, maritime succulent scrub, and coastal sage-chaparral habitats from March 1 through August 15, during Gnatcatcher nesting season, except where documented to the satisfaction of the City Mayor’s Designee that the thinning and pruning would be consistent with conditions of species coverage described in the City of San Diego’s MSCP Subarea Plan.

Additional Information

- [Brush/Weed Abatement](#): City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (619) 533-4444.
- [Property restrictions](#) (easements, permits, deed or title): County Recorder (619) 238-8158.
- [Obtaining permits for brush management on private property with restrictions](#): City of San Diego Development Services Department (619) 446-5000.
- [Brush management on City-owned open space land](#): City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department, Brush Management Section (619) 533-6726 or (619) 685-1350.
- See [Fire Prevention Bureau Policy B-08-1](#) for Clarification of Brush Management Regulations and Landscape Standards.
- See [Bulletin #2](#): Use of Goats for Brush Management as an alternative way to thin brush.

**Authority: City of San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 14, Article 2, Division 4, Sections 142.0402, 142.0403, 142.0412.*



*Published by
San Diego Fire-Rescue Department*

• Revised 5-17-10 •