

# DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUIDELINES

## A FACT SHEET FOR WASHOE COUNTY HOMEOWNERS

**Defensible space** refers to a **minimum** 30-foot area around houses and other buildings where vegetation has been significantly reduced or removed. The purpose of creating defensible space is to reduce the risk of losing homes and other property improvements to a wildfire.

### HOW TO CREATE DEFENSIBLE SPACE

**STEP 1 DETERMINE DEFENSIBLE SPACE DISTANCE.** Use the table below to determine the minimum distance for defensible space, dependent upon slope and native vegetation type surrounding homes.

#### Standard Defensible Space Guidelines

		Defensible Space Recommended Distances Dependent upon Slope		
		Flat to Gently Sloping 0 to 20%	Moderately Steep 21% to 40%	Very Steep >40%
Vegetation Type	Grass Wildland grasses (such as cheatgrass), weeds, and widely scattered shrubs with grass understory.	30 feet	100 feet	100 feet
	Shrubs Includes shrub dominant areas (such as sagebrush, bitterbrush, manzanita) and pinyon-juniper.	100 feet	200 feet	200 feet
	Trees Includes forest areas of the Sierras. If substantial grass or shrub understory is present, use those values shown above.	30 feet	100 feet	200 feet

1) Find the percent slope which best describes your property.  
 2) Find the type of vegetation which best describe the wildland plants growing on or near your property.  
 3) Locate the number in feet corresponding to your slope and vegetation. This is your recommended defensible space distance.

\*Please note the recommendations presented in this diagram are suggestions made by local firefighters experienced in protecting homes from wildfire. They are not requirements nor do they take precedence over local ordinances.

Source for the above graphics: University of Nevada, Reno Agricultural Experiment Station/Cooperative Extension, August 1998. Living With Fire-A Guide for the Homeowner.

**STEP 2 REMOVE.** Cut and remove all dead, diseased or dying trees and shrubs from within the defensible space area. Remove selected trees and shrubs to eliminate continuous fuels extending up to the house. Also remove any flammable debris and firewood piles from within the minimum defensible space distance. Weeds or other dry vegetation should be removed from underneath porches and decks. Eliminate any flammable vegetation or debris within 10 feet of propane tanks. Remove leaves and debris from rain gutters.

- STEP 3 REDUCE.** Reduce vegetation height of shrubs under mature trees to decrease “ladder” fuels. Prune low tree branches to a minimum height of 4 feet and prune branches within 15 feet of structures and chimneys. Reduce accumulations of annual grasses (cheatgrass) through mowing or pre-emergent selective herbicide treatments in the fall. Reduce the accumulation of vegetation around wood fences through mowing or plant removal.
- STEP 4 REPLACE.** Substitute flammable vegetation such as juniper, sagebrush, and rabbitbrush with fire resistant plants. Replacement plantings may include low stature shrubs, decorative rock, lawn, flowerbeds, and succulent vegetation. Irrigation of vegetation throughout the fire season will decrease plant flammability.
- STEP 5 DISPOSE.** It is essential that all tree branches, shrubs, and other plant biomass be removed from the site immediately to a safe disposal area. This material dries rapidly and can contribute to the fire hazard problem if allowed to remain on the premises.
- STEP 6 MAINTAIN.** Maintenance of the defensible space area requires an annual review of fuel reduction guidelines around the home. Action should be taken to maintain an effective defensible space area.

***Remember, good defensible space is –***

***Lean – There are only small amounts of flammable vegetation***

***Clean – There is no accumulation of dead vegetation or flammable debris***

***Green – Existing plants are healthy, green, and irrigated during fire season***

(Source: Living With Fire...In the Big Sagebrush/Bitterbrush Environment. Nevada State Bureau of Land Management.  
Produced by Ed Smith and JoAnne Skelly.)