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Preparing for Upcoming California Wildfire Defensible Space Regulations

The League of California Cities – 2026 Annual Conference
Anaheim, California

September 23, 2026



12

OFFICES



250

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130+

YEARS OF SERVICE



About Us

Best Best & Krieger serves as a trusted partner and strategist to public and private sector clients across the nation. With offices spanning from coast to coast, the firm's attorneys provide innovative legal solutions and cost-effective representation, working to protect and advance clients' interests at every turn. BBK is recognized for decades of groundbreaking successes, loyal service, and a culture that respects and embraces different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences.



BBK

BEST BEST & KRIEGER LLP

Agenda



1. Introductions

Alex Gonzalez, Associate Attorney, Best Best & Krieger LLP

2. Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation

Mike Wink, Staff Chief of Wildfire Risk Reduction, CALFIRE

2. Zone 0 Emergency Regulations

Tony Andersen, Executive Officer, California Board of Forestry & Fire Protection

2. Zone 0 for a Local Responsibility Area

Danielle O'Toole, Fire Marshal, Chino Valley Fire District

2. Q&A



Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation

Staff Chief Mike Wink
Wildfire Risk Reduction

A large fire is burning in a wooded area at night, with thick orange and yellow flames and dark smoke rising into the sky. A red fire truck with the number 83 on its front is parked on a gravel driveway. Several firefighters in yellow gear are standing near the truck and a building. The building has a light-colored stucco exterior and large arched windows. The scene is illuminated by the fire and the truck's lights.

Hazard Risk



**PRESENTED
BY THE
FOREST FIRE
PROTECTION AGENCIES
COPYRIGHT MCMLXIV**



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Defensible Space is the Law

Public Resource Code 4291

- 100 feet defensible space requirement in the SRA
- Foundation for DSI inspections

Government Code 51182

- Defensible space requirements in LRA Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones
- Specifies maintenance of zones around structures
- Local enforcement authority (fire departments, fire districts)



California Wildfire History & Legislative Timeline

A cause-and-effect timeline linking major **destructive fires** to **resulting laws and regulations**

1961 Bel Air Fire

Destroyed ~500 homes,
driven by Santa Ana winds.

PRC 4291 (1961)

- First statutory requirement for defensible space around structures.
- Established the 30 ft Zone

1980 Panorama Fire

325 homes destroyed
4 fatalities

PRC 4201-4204 (1982)

- SRA is classified into FHSZ

1991 Oakland Hills (Tunnel) Fire

2,843 homes and 437 apartment/condos
destroyed; 25 fatalities

PRC 4201-4204 (1992)

- LRA is classified into FHSZ
- Class A roofs required in CA

2003 Cedar Fire

2,820 homes destroyed
15 fatalities

AB 1216 (2003)

- Regulations that would become the WUI Building Code

2017 Tubbs Fire

5,636 structures destroyed
22 fatalities

SB 502 (2006)

- DSpace increased to 100 ft

2018 Camp Fire

18,804 structures destroyed
85 fatalities

AB 3074 (2020)

- Zone 0

2025 Eaton Fire

2025 Palisades

16,246 structures destroyed
31 fatalities

Executive Order (2025)

- Directs BOF to finalize and adopt Zone 0 Regulations



Zone 0 (0–5 Feet)



Ember-resistant zone immediately surrounding the structure



Remove all combustible materials next to buildings



Use non-combustible ground cover (rock, concrete, DG)



Keep the area free of leaf litter, mulch, debris, and vegetation touching walls

Zone 0 can significantly lower the risk of ignition by removing combustible materials from around the perimeter of buildings.

Zone 1 (5–30 Feet): Reduced Fuel Zone

Maintain horizontal and vertical spacing between plants

Remove dead material and litter; regularly prune and maintain

Keep landscape plants healthy





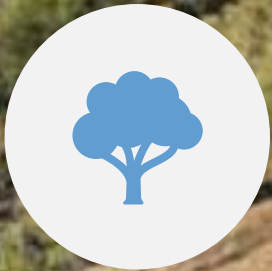
BEFORE



AFTER



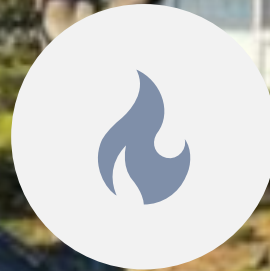
Zone 2 (30–100 Feet): Fuel Reduction Zone



CREATE
SEPARATION
BETWEEN TREES
AND SHRUBS



MOW GRASSES
TO 4 INCHES OR
LESS



REMOVE LADDER
FUELS THAT
ALLOW FIRE TO
CLIMB



REMOVE ALL
DEAD AND DYING
VEGETATION



BEFORE



AFTER





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2025 Local Responsibility Area (LRA) Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VH FHSZ) Update

Updated in 2025 using enhanced fire behavior modeling

Expanded Very High zones in many cities and WUI neighborhoods

Reflects current climate trends, fuels, topography, and recent fire history

New boundaries may shift significantly from previous maps

FHSZ Key Impacts on Cities



**Mandatory enforcement
of Part 7 of the CA
Wildland-Urban Interface
Code ignition-resistant
construction**



**Updates to local
vegetation and defensible
space ordinances**



**Increased public
concerns related to
insurance changes**



**Adjustments required to
planning, permitting, and
GIS systems**

FHSZ Operational & Funding Considerations

Enhanced eligibility for wildfire mitigation grants

Need to update evacuation planning, pre-attack maps, and fuel-reduction priorities

Increased coordination between city fire departments and CAL FIRE

Importance of communicating risk and requirements to residents



CAL FIRE DSpace Inspections



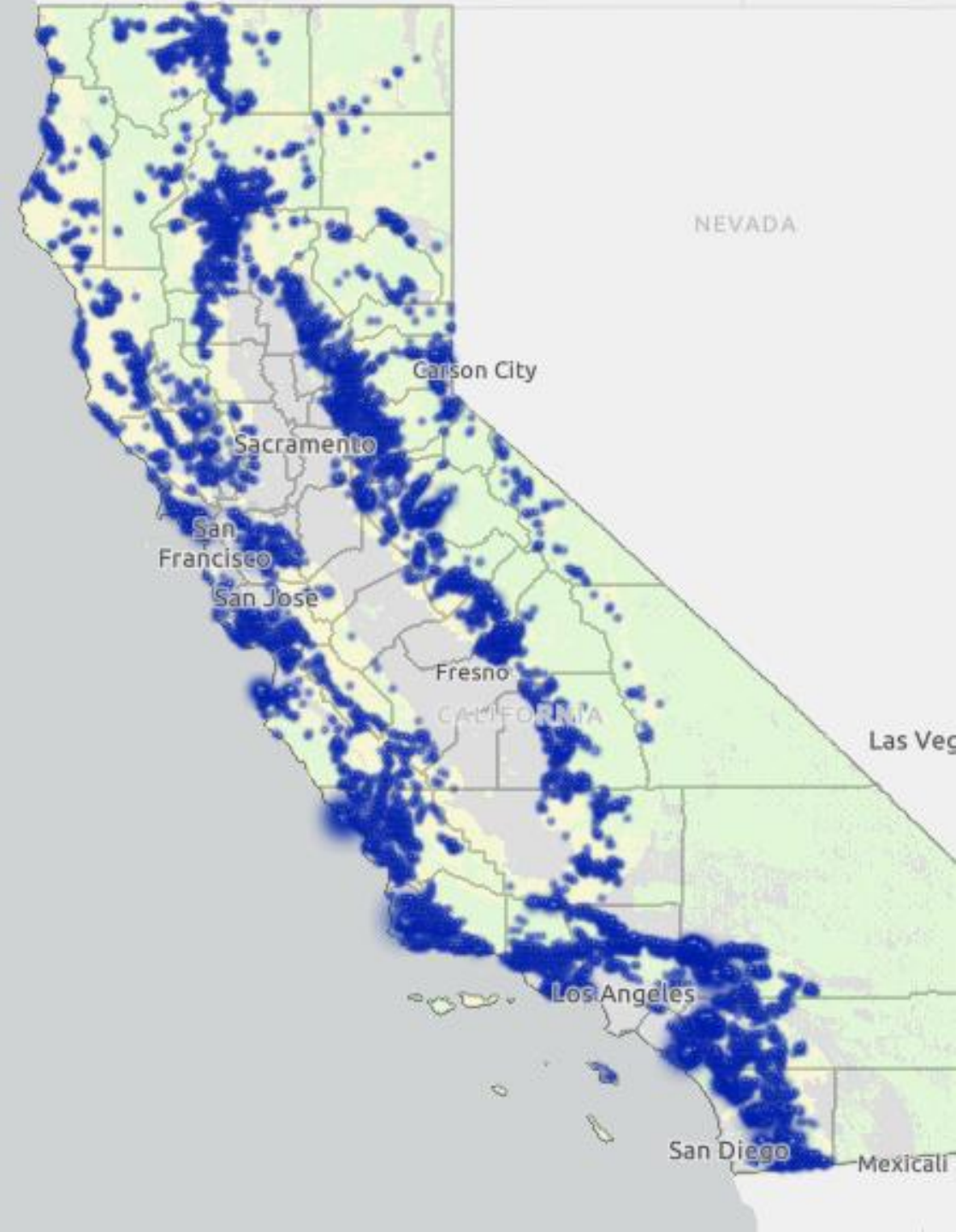
Inspection goal
of 250,000
annual parcel
inspections.



Approximately
750,000
residential
parcels in the
State
Responsibility
Area



Goal is a 3-year
inspection
cycle





Real Estate Inspections – Civil Code 1102.19

A seller of real property located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone shall provide the buyer with documentation stating that the property complies with PRC 4291 or local vegetation management ordinances.

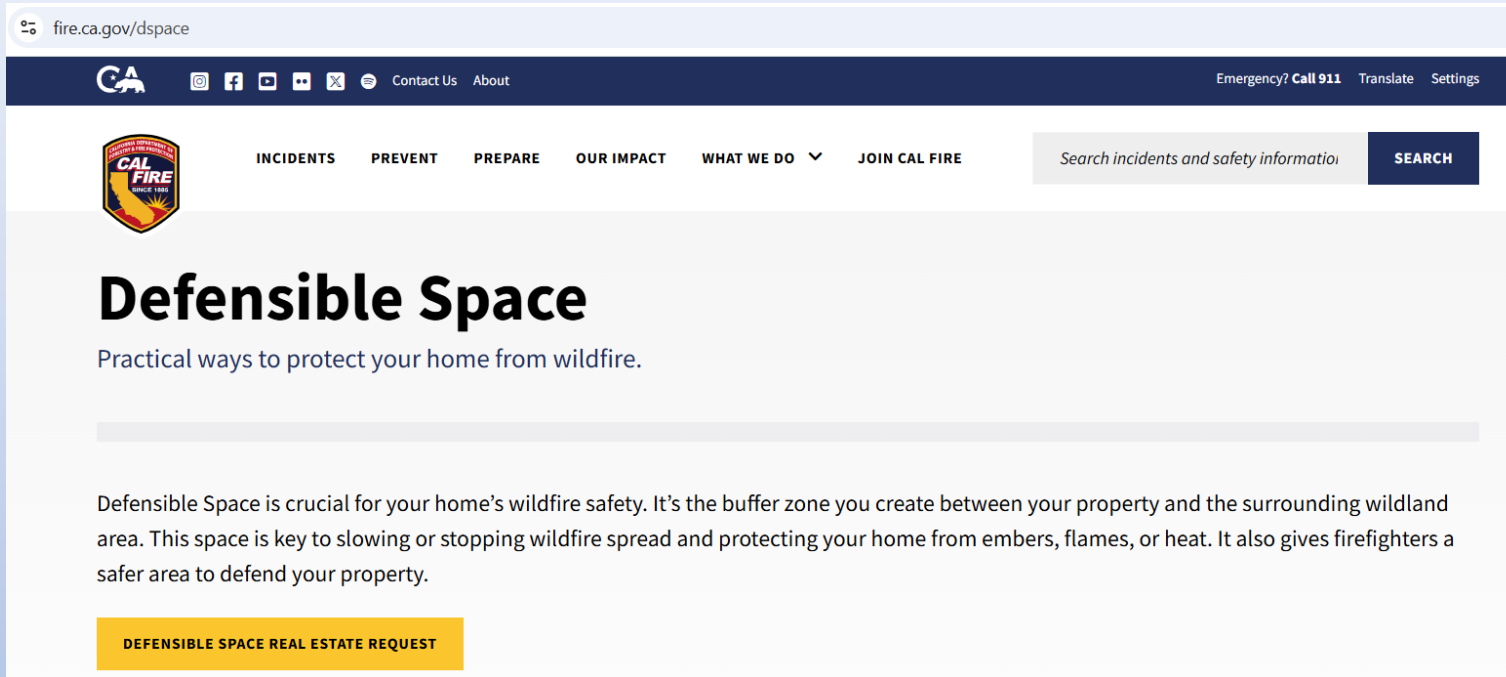


Requesting an Inspection?

- A person who owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains (or someone who can legally represent them, like a Realtor) can request the inspection.
- An inspection should be requested as soon as possible.
 - Gives the seller time, if any violations are found, to become compliant and reinspected.
 - The inspection is valid for up to 6 months.
 - CAL FIRE's goal is to schedule inspections within 10 days of the request.



How to Request an Inspection in the SRA?



www.fire.ca.gov/dspace

Can also search: “CAL FIRE Inspection”



CAL FIRE Self-Assessment Tools

<https://www.fire.ca.gov/dspace>

YOUR COUNTY MAY HAVE STRICTER STANDARDS

California has diverse regional climates, and some local government agencies have stricter standards than the State's minimum requirements. For example, San Diego County requires 50 feet of clearance in Zone 1. Check with your local fire department or fire protection district for defensible space or weed abatement requirements.

If you reside in the following counties, please visit:

[Los Angeles Defensible Space](#)

[Marin County Defensible Space](#)

[Orange County Fire Authority - Ready, Set, Go](#)

[Santa Barbara Defensible Space](#)

[Ventura County Defensible Space](#)

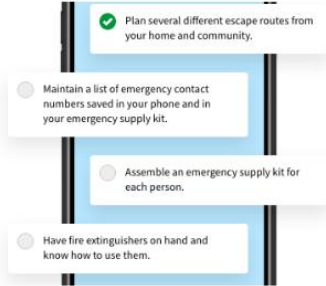
[Search Local Ordinances Near You](#)

GETTING PREPARED RESOURCES



Check Your Readiness

Use our self-assessment tool to see how prepared your property is for wildfire.



Create A Custom Plan

Make a personalized plan to prepare for wildfire.



Wildfire Action Plan

Take an interactive look through our Wildfire Action Plan.



Questions?



CAL FIRE DSpace Link Tree



Scan for Defensible Space and Home Hardening Resources



Board of Forestry Zone 0 Information

CAL FIRE Websites

Ready Set Go Brochure

Low-Cost Retrofit List

Fire Hazard Severity Zones

Historical Fire Perimeters

Firewise

Wildfire Research

DSpace Laws

And more....



TONY ANDERSEN | EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Board of Forestry & Fire Protection

- 1965—California enacts PRC 4291. Vegetation modification requirements around buildings in forest, brush, and grass-covered areas.
- 1982—California enacts PRC 4201—4204. State Responsibility Areas (SRA) are classified into Fire Hazard Severity Zones.
- 1991- State establishes Fire Safe Regulations PRC 4290
- 1992—Following the Oakland-Berkeley Hills fire, passage of the Bates Bill (AB 337). Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) based on accumulated fuels, topography, fire weather, building density.
- 2005- Defensible space Zone 2, 30 to 100 feet.
- 2008- Wildland Urban Interface Building Standards (WUIBS) Chapter 7A—California Building Code
- 2018- Fire Safe Regulations (SB 901) update
- 2020- AB 3074 to create Zone 0 in the existing defensible space PRC 4291 to address embers
- 2021- Board of Forestry and Fire Protection updating the Fire Safe Regulations
- 2024- SB 504 clarifies elements of Zone 0 (same standards for new and existing construction)
- 2025- AB 1455 further clarifies elements of Zone 0 (pathway for local equivalency standards)



The new rules focus on building vulnerabilities
and separates fuel from these locations

An illustration of a two-story house with a grey shingled roof, green trim, and light-colored siding. The house has multiple windows and two sets of stairs leading to different levels of the porch. Various fire safety callouts are overlaid on the image. The background is a light blue sky with some clouds.

Vents: Ember and
flame resistant

Windows: protect
from heat

Noncombustible
gate attachment

Decks: remove
combustibles
on or under
decks

Under eave: remove
fuels to prevent heat
and flame trapping

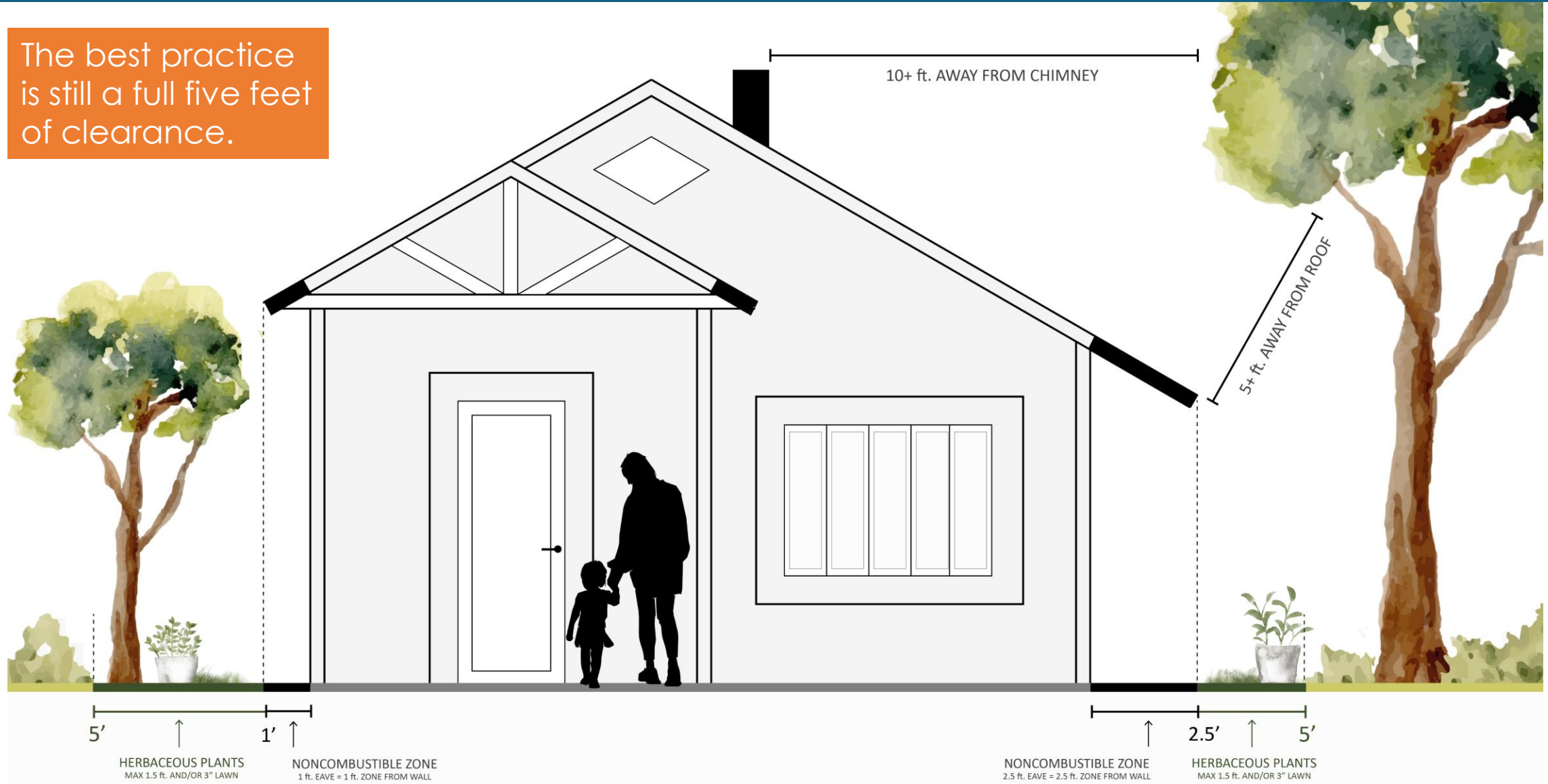
Edge of wall: protect from
direct flame contact

Image courtesy of Kathy Weber and
Humboldt County Fire Safe Council



New rules focus on the edge of the wall, under eave vulnerabilities, windows, and vents

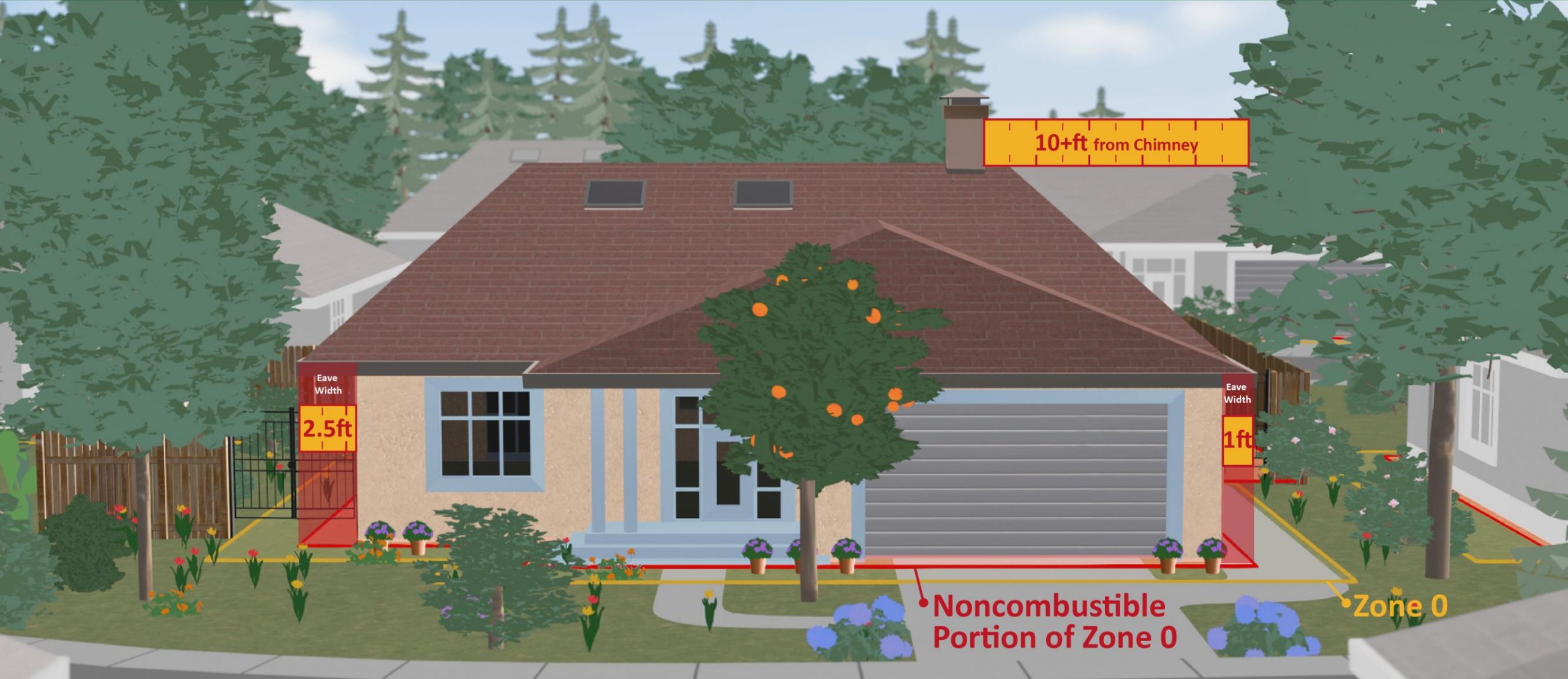
The best practice is still a full five feet of clearance.



Noncombustible zone based on eave width with an allowance for

* herbaceous plants 1.5ft maximum height and/or lawn 3in maximum height

* potted plants Located outside of eave dripline to 5ft



2.5ft eave width = 2.5ft noncombustible zone from the wall

1ft eave = 1ft noncombustible zone from the wall

Herbaceous plants (max 1.5ft) and/or 3in lawn height are permitted 2.5-5ft from the wall

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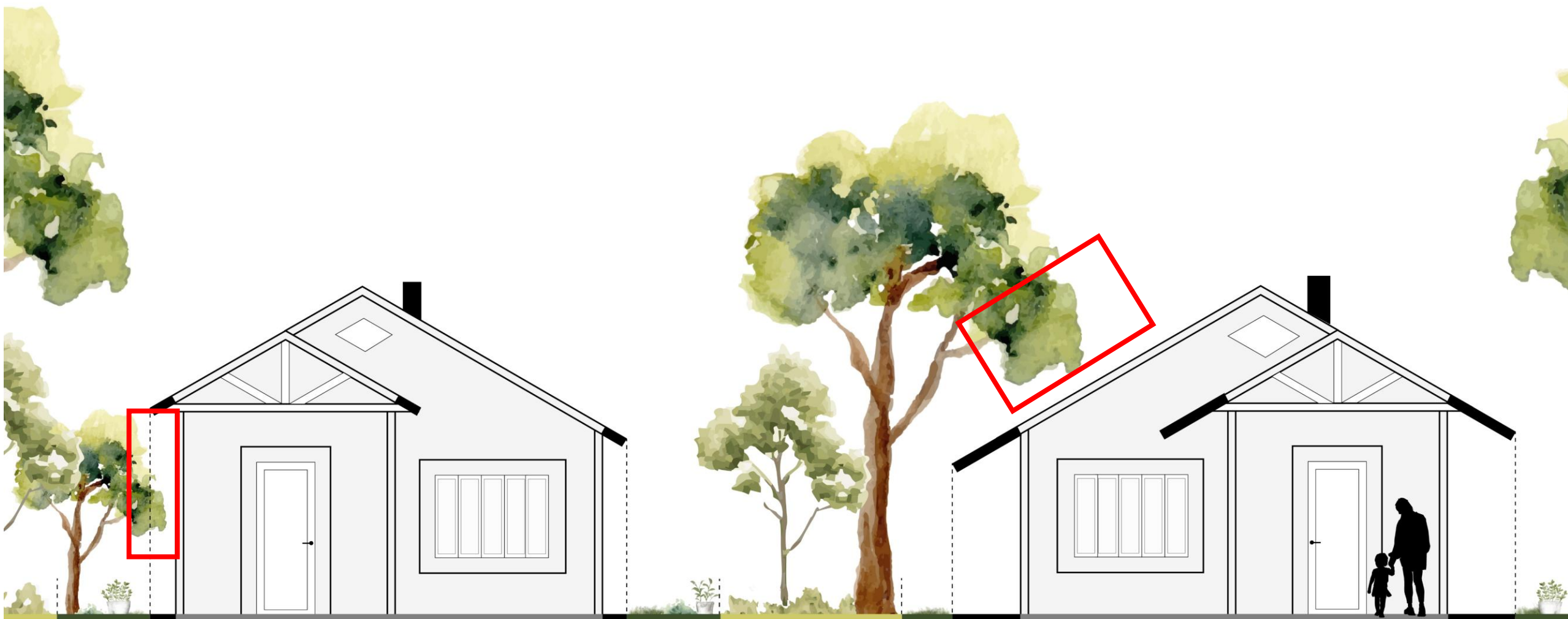
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TREES ARE ALLOWED

- With maintenance, no dead or dying limbs
- No limbs under eaves
- Trimmed 5 feet above roofs
- Trimmed 10 feet from chimneys (per existing statute)
- No new trees in Zone 0



SHALLOW EAVE

DEEP EAVE

VEGETATION IS ALLOWED, WITH CONDITIONS

- No combustibles from the wall to the eave dripline (min = 1 ft)
- Eave dripline to 5 feet: small potted plants, smaller in-ground non-woody plants, lawn or other ground cover, well-maintained trees

GATES, DECKS, FENCES ARE ALLOWED, WITH CONDITIONS

- Replace combustible gate within 5 feet of structure
- No new combustible fences, can repair current fences
- No combustible sheds/outbuildings in Zone Zero
- Decks are part of the structure, removal not required

PHASE-IN TIMELINE: WITHIN 3 YEARS

- Remove combustible materials: mulch, firewood, etc.
- Vegetation and landscaping
- Adjust for vegetation allowances

PHASE-IN TIMELINE: WITHIN 5 YEARS

- Creating your home's safety zone
- Replace gates if needed
- Potentially replace fencing and shed materials

ZONE 0 AND LOCAL AGENCIES

- Applies to State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within the LRA (search your address online)
- Enforcement within the affected LRA areas will be up to each local fire authority
- A city may enact stricter or “alternative practices” based on local conditions

LOCAL FLEXIBILITY INCLUDED IN DRAFT RULES

- Cities in LRA with VHFSZs may adopt an ordinance with stricter and/or alternative practices
- If no action, statewide regulations as adopted apply
- Must have substantially similar outcomes
- Based on community need: fire risk, lot size, structure composition, potential response, etc. Could include any number of variations
- Regulation (14 CCR 1298.03) requires City Council approval (with local fire authority) of local Zone 0 ordinance

EDUCATION AND PROGRESS, NOT PENALTIES

- Working with your inspector, create a plan
- Notable progress and best faith effort over time
- Common sense towards fire safety





Different Ways to Get There – Based on Your Time, Budget, and Needs



1) ALREADY IN COMPLIANCE, DO IT YOURSELF, AND SMALL PROJECTS

*Use your time, sweat equity,
and basic tools to make
a big difference.*

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Clear leaves, debris, and flammable materials
- Trim and space plants
- Use basic tools
- Improve tools and materials
- Replace or relocate some plants
- Add simple features (pots, hardscape touches)



2) MIDDLE GROUND

*Make a few improvements
that add up. Hire help
if you need.*

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Install small improvements (gate, fencing section)
- Expand vegetation changes
- Continue maintenance and spacing



3) HIRING SUPPORT, LARGER PROJECTS, PREMIUM UPGRADE OR RESET

*Bring in help for bigger projects
and full upgrades.*

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Hire labor for yardwork or installation
- Add pavers or more durable materials
- Larger vegetation replacement
- Major redesign or full replacement
- Premium materials and installation
- Long-term, low-maintenance setup

You're Not Alone: Help for Creating Defensible Space

Resources. Neighbors. Support.



1. FUNDING &
FINANCIAL HELP



2. HANDS-ON
SUPPORT



3. COMMUNITY &
NONPROFIT HELP



4. SAVINGS &
BENEFITS



5. LOCAL
OPPORTUNITIES



Every step you
take makes your
home and community
safer.





JOIN OUR E-MAIL LIST





Zone 0 for Local Responsibility Area



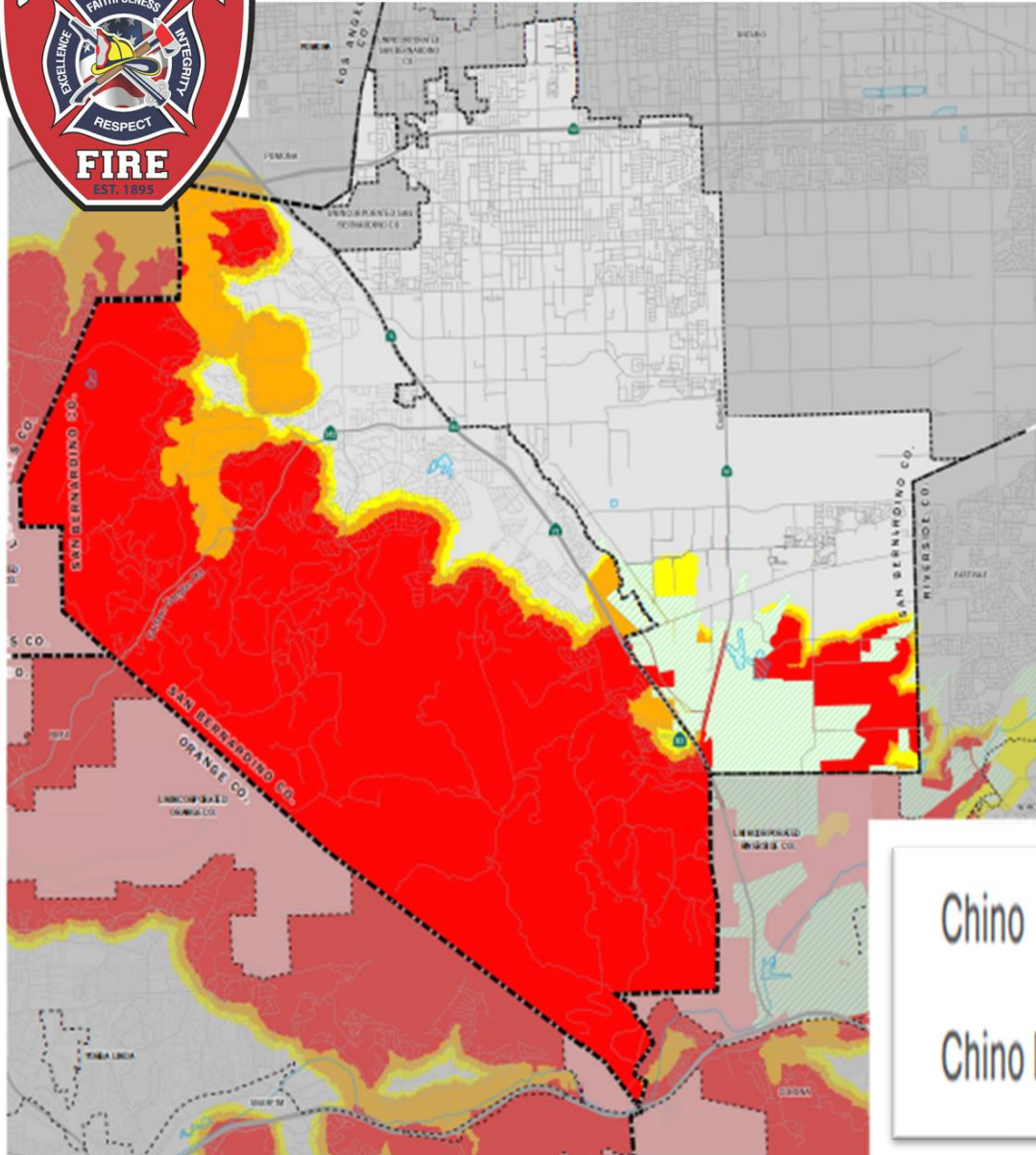


Vegetation Management Program

- Weed and Hazard Abatement Program
- Ordinance 2022-01

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone

- Chino - No Existing Structures | Future Development
- Chino Hills - Approx. 9500 Parcels



Chino

321

185

1,095

Chino Hills

753

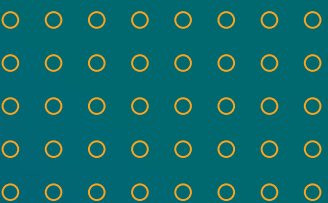
2,845

20,923

3,666



Be a hero...Do Zone 0!



Q&A



QR Code Destination

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