Here's How to Get Started: Create a Fire Safe Landscape in Seven Steps

Step One
Evaluate the environment around your home. What will catch on fire? Be on the lookout for those "little things" that can burn your home; this can include lounge cushions, papers or anything flammable outside or near your home. Also consider slope, prevailing winds, vegetation type and density, and exposure to direct sun.

Step Two
Determine what you need to do. Start with the closest Home Ignition Zone and work toward the Defensible Space Zone and through the Wildland Fuel Reduction Zone.

Step Three
Develop a plan for correcting any fire safe problems identified in steps one and two. Consider completing your work prior to June 1 of each year before fuel conditions become too dry. Make sure your power tools have approved spark arresters and, if working in the summer months, complete all work before 10 a.m. Coordinate with adjacent land owners if possible and incorporate existing formal landscape features.

Step Four
Consider codes and regulations related to defensible space, burning, work performed near waterways, and tree removal; if necessary, secure permits such as burn permits.

Step Five
Implement the plan. Get help and any needed equipment. Begin work in the Home Ignition Zone and work out from there.

Step Six
Remove all slash and debris generated during the fuel modification process by chipping, burning or disposal at your local vegetative waste site. Contact your local fire department for permit requirements. Contact your local Fire Safe Council about their chipping, home consultation and other programs. Find your local Fire Safe Council at www.FireSafeCouncil.org.

Step Seven
Continue to monitor and evaluate the fire safe condition of your home and landscape. Maintain your home's resistance to fire and the defensible space in the surrounding property on a routine basis—annually or more frequently, if needed. For new construction, consider fire resistant materials such as concrete panels, stone, brick or other material that doesn’t burn easily.

Is Your Home a Safe Place to Stay?

You live in an area of natural beauty—but it’s also prone to wildfire. In fact, it’s not a matter of if the brushlands of California will burn, it’s a matter of when that will happen.

Fortunately, you can take steps today to dramatically improve your odds of survival by making your property "fire safe." A fire safe property is one where the home and landscape resist the impact of fire. A fire safe landscape is a beautiful landscape that not only protects your home from fire but can also increase the value of your home.

The Fire Environment

Fire behavior is affected by a variety of factors—some of these you can do something about and others are weather-related and beyond your control. Understanding these terms will help you make your home and the surrounding property fire safe.

Fuels: Any flammable materials that will burn. This includes everything from the home itself to plants, dried leaves in the rain gutter, brush, wood shingles, patio furniture and deck material. If it will burn, it’s a fuel.

Ignition: The point at which a fire starts as a result of fuel contacting with embers, firebrands (not, flying embers), direct flame, or superheated air.

Topography: Primarily slope or the steepness of the incline on which your house is situated. Also your home’s location on the slope and proximity to canyons or ravines.

Weather: Primarily wind, but also air temperature and humidity (moisture content of the air).

Extreme X-Factor: A multiplication factor used to increase the defensible space around a home due to extreme fire behavior factors such as slope, and/or constant or unusually strong winds. If your home is located on or near the top of a slope and/or receives constant or unusually strong winds you must increase the defensible space in Zones 2 and 3 by a multiplication of 1.5 (X-Factor). For instance, in Zone 2, increase the defensible space from 100 feet to 150 feet.

The Fire Environment

Weather:

- Primarily wind, but also air temperature and humidity (moisture content of the air).
- Temperature varies greatly from season to season.
- Humidity affects the rate at which fuels dry, and thus the rate at which fires burn.
- Conditions that favor fire behavior include high temperatures, low relative humidity, and strong winds.

- High/low: The temperature is high/low throughout the day.
- Dry/wet: The moisture in the air is dry/wet.
- Sustained: The wind is sustained for several hours.
- Gusts: The wind is gusty, increasing rapidly and suddenly.

The Fire Environment continues on the next page.
Your “defensible space” is the area that is a minimum of 100 feet from your home (as required under State Public Resources Code 4291 or other local ordinances). This is the area where you’ve modified the landscaping to allow your house to survive on its own—greatly improving the odds for firefighters who are defending your home.

If your home is on a slope or subject to high winds, extend the distance of this zone based upon the “X-Factor.” For instance, this zone may increase, then, to 150 feet (1.5 X 100 feet).

Experts recommend a minimum of 10 feet of spacing between individual trees and shrubs, measured at the crown (widest part) of the tree or shrub. You may need to increase this distance based on your property’s X-Factor.

Mature trees should also be limbed up 10 feet, or 1/3 of their live crown height, whichever is greater.

It’s possible, depending upon the size of your property, that you will be limited by your property boundary and unable to complete the fire safe measures identified in Zones 2 and 3. If this happens, talk with your neighbors and ask for their cooperation. A safer home means a safer neighborhood for everyone.

Burning embers landing on wood shake roofs are one of the leading risk factors for losing your home to a wildfire. If possible, replace wood shingle roofs with non-flammable (Class-A) roofing materials, such as asphalt shingles, tile or metal roofing.

1. Keep your rain gutters and roof clean of all flammable material.
2. Get rid of dry grass, brush and other flammable materials around your home—and don’t forget leaves, pine needles and bark walkways. Replace with well maintained (watered) landscape vegetation, green lawn and landscape rocks.
3. Clear all flammable materials from your deck. This includes brooms, stacked wood and easily ignitable patio furniture. Also enclose or board up the area under your deck to keep it from becoming a fuel bed for hot embers.
4. Move woodpiles and garbage cans away from your home. Keep woodpiles away from the home a distance of 2 times the height of the pile—more if lot size allows.
5. Use fine mesh metal screen (1/4” or less) to cover eaves, roof and foundation vents to prevent windblown embers from entering.
6. Inspect and clean your chimney every year. Trim away branches within 10 feet. Install a spark arrester with 1/2” or smaller mesh screen.
7. Got a propane tank? Get rid of any flammable materials within 10 feet of it and, if possible, position it at least 30 feet from any structures.
8. Window screens should be metal, not plastic or other flammable or meltable material.

Find out more ways to make your home fire safe: www.DiabloFireSafe.org