



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FIRE SAFETY WEED ABATEMENT

1. What is weed abatement?

Weed abatement or fuel modification is controlling the growth vegetation and removing dead vegetation to create a “defensible space” that will improve a structure's chance of surviving a wildfire and help stop fires from spreading from open space areas to homes and other structures. A defensible space is a buffer created between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surround it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire and it helps protect your home from catching fire—either from embers, direct flame contact or radiant heat. Proper defensible space also provides firefighters with a safe area to work in, to defend structures.

2. When is weed abatement done?

Weed abatement services are performed once the rainy season is over in order to minimize the amount of regrowth in areas where the weed abatement is completed. For 2023, the contract for fire safety weed abatement services was awarded by the City Council on August 2, 2023, so it is expected that the weed abatement will occur from September 2023 through December 2023. In future years, it is anticipated that weed abatement will occur June through October each year.

3. What are the Very High, High and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones, and who determines these zones?

Fire hazard severity zones indicate the potential fire hazard on an area of land, based on several factors, including vegetation, topography, worst case weather conditions, fire history, predicted flame lengths, burn probability and ember cast. CAL FIRE is mandated to classify all lands within the state by California Public Resources Code 4201-4204.

4. How will locations be prioritized for weed abatement?

The contract for the fire safety weed abatement services requires the vendor to provide a schedule for the work that prioritizes highest fire risk areas, such as areas with radio towers for emergency services, south facing slopes, and canyons with south facing slopes, and allows for entire canyons or contract areas to be completed at one time even if not all of the canyon or contract area is south facing. The priority given to south facing slopes is from discussions with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

5. What is the City doing for weed abatement?

The work includes a total of 167 areas of open space areas, canyons, and right-of-way corridors. Each of the 167 areas are divided into two zones for a total of 170 feet from property lines. The two zones or categories of clearance are:

- Zone 1 (Defensible Space): First 20 feet from the property line.
- Zone 2 (Reduced Fuel Zone): The area that is 20 to 170 feet from the property line.

This measurement of 170 feet is based on the requirement to clear brush 200 feet from a structure; however, the City can only clear brush from property lines, not private structures. In discussions

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with Los Angeles County Fire captains in Palos Verdes Estates, it was determined that on average 30 feet of the brush clearance is on private property and the City should include 170 feet of brush clearance in the proposed fire safety weed abatement contract.

The Defensible Space (Zone 1) has more aggressive clearance requirements than the Reduced Fuel Zone (Zone 2) as described below.

- Zone 1 – Defensible Space Clearance Requirements
 - Trimming of all vegetation to remove all dead and flammable portions to a minimum of 20 feet from the property line.
 - Removal of all flammable and combustible items exposed by the clearing.
 - Native and ornamental trees and shrubs that are individually planted can be retained provided they are cut back, limbed up and thinned out. Fuel management requires breaking up the continuity of fuels, both vertically and spatially, and reducing the proportion of dead to live wood.
 - Trees are to be trimmed up from the ground 10-15 feet or one-third their height.
 - Shrubs are to be trimmed 2 feet from the ground or trimmed down to 36 inches, spaced to provide a separation between plants at a ratio of 2 to one (for every foot of plant height provide two feet of separation from other plants) and space from a structure that provides an adequate fire break of 30 feet from a roof and does not form a fuel ladder to any structure.
 - All hedges or continuous plants adjacent to the property lines are to be removed in the first 20 feet from the property line starting at 1 foot from the property line.
 - Removal of ground covers like ice plant, ivy and plumbago, which pose a fire risk due to a layer of dead and dry entangled thatch under the green surface.
 - Removal of trash in the work area.
 - Removal of all invasive plants, weeds and ornamental non-native plants identified as threats to the health and safety of the Parklands.
- Zone 2 – Reduced Fuel Zone Clearance Requirements
 - Clearing, cutting back, thinning out, limbing up and removal of all flammable and invasive vegetation or combustible growth in the area from 20 to 170 feet from the property line.
 - Removal of all invasive plants, weeds and ornamental non-native plants identified as threats to the health and safety of the Parklands.
 - Removal of dead and dying woody surface and aerial fuels. This eliminates trees, bushes, shrubs and surface debris that are completely dead, or with substantial amounts of dead branches or leaves/needles that would readily burn.
 - Loose surface litter consisting of fallen leaves or needles, twigs, bark, cones and small branches is permitted to a depth of 3 inches.
 - Down logs or stumps when embedded in the soil may be left in place when isolated from other vegetation.
 - Establish fuel separation both vertically and horizontally.
 - Trimming of shrubs to 36 inches in height and 10 feet maximum width.
 - Removal of all dead wood, lower branches from 8-15 feet (or lower 1/3 for small trees) and all surface materials on the ground under the canopy and within 5 feet of the canopy of the tree.
 - Trimmings can be chipped and spread to a maximum depth of 3 inches in depth.
 - Removal of trash in the work area.

Additionally, topography and aspect affects the intensity, rate and direction of fires. Steeper south facing slopes have a more severe fire hazard. Maximum fuel separation and elevating branches to the upper range of pruning requirements is required in these areas.

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6. How were ornamental non-native plants considered threats to the health and safety of the Parklands identified?

The City referenced the Invasive Plant Council of Southern California, <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/>, in conjunction with City Staff experience and discussions with Los Angeles County Fire Department to write this portion of the specifications to focus on fuel reduction that is specific to plant species present in Palos Verdes Estates.

7. Why is a range provided for how high trees will limbed up or trimmed and how is the final trim height determined? Why is the tree trim height different for Zone 1 and Zone 2?

The specification for Zone 1 is to trim trees 10-15 feet or 1/3 of the height of the tree, so if the tree is small enough that 1/3 of the height is less than 10 feet, then the 1/3 of the height requirement would prevail. The 10-15 feet was to provide the contractors a reference so that they know how to propose a cost. The trimming in Zone 2 is equivalent and not more aggressive. The 1/3 of the height of the tree requirement is still used and 15 feet was used as a reference since in Zone 2 it is expected that there will be lower vegetation on the ground that remains in place for erosion control and aesthetics. With the lower vegetation, the clearance requirement is from the top of the vegetation to the bottom of the tree branches.

8. What is the difference between fire safety weed abatement and landscape maintenance?

Weed abatement services differ from landscape maintenance services and are performed by different vendors. Weed abatement services have the goal to complete more of a clearing of an area, such as clearance that is needed to reduce flashy fuels and to create spacing between shrubs and trees and reduce fire risk, and weed abatement services are completed once per year. Alternatively, landscape maintenance services are for more manicured and more detailed areas throughout the City and are completed periodically throughout the year. For more information on landscape maintenance services, please visit the City's Landscape Maintenance webpage, <https://www.pvestates.org/services/public-works/landscape-maintenance>.

9. What are the weed abatement requirements that the City is required to comply with?

The Los Angeles County Fire Department uses the following resources to share information regarding the brush clearance requirements:

- This Los Angeles County webpage: <https://fire.lacounty.gov/fire-hazard-reduction-programs/#1568739547130-a8e6a918-feed>
- The Los Angeles County's "Guide to Defensible Space" document: https://fire.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Defensible-Space-booklet-32023_.pdf
- The Los Angeles County's "Ready Set Go" document: https://fire.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Ready-set-go_06062023_NoBleed_Page-Does-not-include-Zone-0.pdf
- The Brush Clearance Notice sent by LA County: https://fire.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/FD_Annual-Brush-Notice-2023-2.27.23-updated.-fuel-modification.extra-hazard.Fire-road-REVISED-2-28-23.pdf

In regards to the actual code requirements, Los Angeles County Code Section 4907.3, which is the LA County Code Section for Defensible Space Requirements, states: "Hazardous vegetation and fuels around all buildings and structures shall be maintained in accordance with the following laws and regulations:

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- Public Resources Code, Section 4291.
(https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=4291.&lawCode=PRC)
- California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 1.5, Chapter 7, Subchapter 3, Article 3, Section 1299.03.
([https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I47E4A92E5B4D11EC976B000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I47E4A92E5B4D11EC976B000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)))
- California Government Code, Section 51182.
(https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=GOV§ionNum=51182.)
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, Chapter 1, Subchapter 1, Article 3, Section 3.07.
([https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I0896C62A5BE511EC98C8000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Document/I0896C62A5BE511EC98C8000D3A7C4BC3?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)))
- Los Angeles County Code, Title 32, including Section 325. This is the entire Los Angeles County Fire Code, which is the fire building code, this section 4907.3, etc. and the referenced Section 325 “Clearance of Brush and Vegetative Growth.” Title 32 is available at this link,
https://library.municode.com/ca/los_angeles_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT32FICO, and can be used to access the subsections, such as Section 325.

Additionally, in the Los Angeles County’s Code, Title 32, Section 325.2.1, it states that Los Angeles County can require more than 100 ft of defensible space, and Los Angeles County has required the 200 feet of defensible space in high fire areas like the Palos Verdes Peninsula. This is referenced in the Guide to Defensible Space and is shown in LA County’s “Ready Set Go” document and the Brush Clearance Notice sent by Los Angeles County.

10. What is the responsibility of Palos Verdes Estates residents?

In 2023, many Palos Verdes Estates residents received brush clearance notices from the Los Angeles County Fire Department for the first time. The Brush Clearance deadline is June 1. Notices are being sent to all properties within the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFSZ), which includes all of Palos Verdes Estates. Previously, notices were only sent to homes that were deemed most vulnerable via visual inspection or historical fire data. That means that the number of homes receiving notices in Palos Verdes Estates significantly increased from previous years. The inspection requirement for all homes within the VHFSZ has been in place for decades, but recent GIS/mapping software upgrades have allowed all structures to be identified, many of them for the first time.

For more information, please see the Los Angeles County Department Brush Clearance Notice (https://fire.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/FD_Annual-Brush-Notice-2023-2.27.23-updated-fuel-modification.extra-hazard.Fire-road-REVISED-2-28-23.pdf), the Peninsula Cities Annual Clearance Brochure (<https://www.pvestates.org/home/showpublisheddocument/16904/638156059892100000>), and the associated Frequently Asked Questions available on the City’s Annual Brush Clearance website: <https://www.pvestates.org/services/public-works/brush-clearance>. Please note that the Peninsula Cities Annual Clearance Brochure references 2023 requirement information and requirements that will not be enforced until 2024.