



Pre-Fire Management

What is Pre-Fire Management?

Since 1990, more than 17,000 homes and other structures have been damaged or destroyed by wildfires in CAL FIRE's jurisdiction. By placing emphasis on what needs to be done long before a fire starts, Pre-Fire Management actions can reduce property losses, fire fighting costs, increase firefighter safety and contribute to ecosystem health.

Pre-fire activities such as, clearing a defensible space, planting and maintaining fire safe landscaping, utilizing prescribed fire, creating fuel breaks and managing forests effectively, are proven methods of reducing wildfire destruction.

In 2003, over 3,700 homes were destroyed by wildfires in Southern California alone. Pre-Fire Management is a term all Californian's living in a wildland setting need to know.

Defensible Space

When you remove flammable vegetation and create a fire safe landscape at least 100 feet around structures, you create a "defensible space" that will help protect your home and provide a safety zone for the firefighters who are battling the flames.

Defensible space around your home and other structures not only provides the greatest chance for survival, it is also required by California Law (PRC 4291). Check with your local fire department for defensible space requirements in your area.



While the fire burned all around, defensible space, gave firefighters the chance to save this home.

Fire Safe Landscaping

Defensible space does not mean bare dirt.

- Plan your landscape to eliminate a continuous path of vegetation, or "fire ladder" that will carry wildfire to your home.
- Use fire resistant plants, native species, green lawn, rock, stone and other materials to create an attractive and fire safe landscape.
- Space trees at least 10 feet apart, and choose shrubs and trees that are no higher than 18 inches within your 100 feet defensible space area.
- Remove lower tree branches within six feet of the ground to prevent fire from travelling up and through the trees.
- Keep trees trimmed at least 10 feet from your chimney and away from your roof.
- Maintain your landscaping with regular watering and weeding.



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Prescribed Fires/Vegetation Management Program (VMP)

The use of “prescribed” or intentionally set fire, under controlled circumstances can remove unhealthy and dangerously overgrown vegetation before a wildfire strikes. Prescribed fire projects reduce the risk of large, damaging wildfires while improving the growing conditions of native plants and wildlife.

The CAL FIRE Vegetation Management Program (VMP) is a cost-sharing program with landowners. The program focuses on the use of prescribed fire and mechanical means to address wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands.



A VMP burn removes the dense underbrush without killing the trees.



The varying pattern and vegetation left throughout this fuel break blends better with the environment and maintains wildlife habitat.

Fuel Breaks

Fuel breaks are wide strips of land on which trees and vegetation have been significantly and in some cases, permanently reduced or removed.

They may also be large greenbelt areas built into communities. These areas can slow and even stop, the spread of a wildland fire because they provide fewer fuels to carry the flames. They also provide firefighters with safe zones to take a stand against a wildfire, or retreat from flames if the need arises.

Forest Management

Densely-packed forested and vegetated areas provide ample fuel for flames to spread. Well-managed forests and wildland areas reduce fire hazard while improving forest health, wildlife habitat and watershed resources.



< This is an unthinned forest. The trees are densely packed. If flames get into this area they will easily spread from tree to tree.

> This is that same area of forest after a wildfire burned through. Note the trees in the stand that have been completely scorched. If this forest had been managed through selective thinning many more trees would be left with their foliage.

