

Maintaining Your Defensible Space

Your home is located in a dynamic environment that is always changing. Trees, grasses and shrubs continue to grow, die or are damaged, and drop their leaves and needles each season. Just like your home, the defensible space around it requires regular, ongoing maintenance to be effective. Use the following checklists to build and maintain your defensible space.

Defensible Space: Initial Projects

- Properly thin and prune trees and shrubs within Zones 1 and 2.
- Dispose of slash from tree/shrub thinning.
- Screen attic, roof, eaves and foundation vents, and periodically check them to ensure that they are in good condition.
- Screen or wall-in stilt foundations and decks; screens should be 1/8-inch or smaller metal mesh (1/16-inch mesh is best).
- Post signs at the end of the driveway with your last name and house number that are noncombustible, reflective and easily visible to emergency responders.
- Make sure that the driveway is wide enough for fire trucks to enter and exit, and that trees and branches are adequately cleared for access by fire and emergency equipment. Contact your local fire department or check the CSFS website for information specific to access.
- Take pictures of your completed defensible space for comparison of forest growth over time.



Figure 26: Keeping the forest properly thinned and pruned in a defensible space will reduce the chances of a home burning during a wildfire. Photo: CSFS

Defensible Space Tasks: Annual Requirements

- Clear roof, deck and gutters of pine needles and other debris. *
- Mow grass and weeds to a height of 6 inches or less. *
- Rake all pine needles and other flammable debris away from the foundation of your home and deck. *
- Remove trash and debris accumulations from the defensible space.*
- Check fire extinguishers to ensure that they have not expired and are in good working condition.
- Check chimney screens to make sure they are in place and in good condition.
- Remove branches that overhang the roof and chimney.
- Check regrowth of trees and shrubs by reviewing photos of your original defensible space; properly thin and prune trees and shrubs within Zones 1 and 2.
- Dispose of slash from tree/shrub thinning. *

*Address more than once per year, as needed.

Be Prepared

- Complete a checklist of fire safety needs inside your home (these should be available at your local fire department). Examples include having an evacuation plan and maintaining smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
- Develop your fire evacuation plan and practice family fire drills. Ensure that all family members are aware of and understand escape routes, meeting points and other emergency details.
- Contact your county sheriff's office and ensure that your home telephone number and any other important phone numbers appear in the county's Reverse 911 or other emergency notification database.
- Prepare a "grab and go" disaster supply kit that will last at least three days, containing your family's and pets' necessary items, such as cash, water, clothing, food, first aid and prescription medicines.
- Ensure that an outdoor water supply is available. If it is safe to do so, make a hose and nozzle available for responding firefighters. The hose should be long enough to reach all parts of the house.



Figure 27: Sharing information and working with your neighbors and community will give your home and surrounding areas a better chance of surviving a wildfire. Photo: CSFS

Preparing your home and property from wildfire is a necessity if you live in the wildland-urban interface. It is important to adequately modify the fuels in your home ignition zone. Remember, every task you complete around your home and property will make your home more defensible during a wildfire.

Always remember that creating and maintaining an effective defensible space in the home ignition zone is not a one-time endeavor – it requires an ongoing, long-term commitment.

If you have questions, please contact your local CSFS district office. Contact information can be found at www.csfs.colostate.edu.

List of Additional Resources

- The Colorado State Forest Service, <http://www.csfs.colostate.edu>
- CSFS wildfire-related publications, <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/wf-publications.html>
- Community Wildfire Protection Planning, <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/community-wf-protection-planning.html>
- Colorado's "Are You FireWise?" information, <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pages/wf-protection.html>
- National Fire Protection Association's Firewise Communities USA, <http://www.firewise.org>
- Fire Adapted Communities, <http://fireadapted.org/>
- Ready, Set, Go!, <http://wildlandfirersg.org/>



Figure 28: *This house has a high risk of burning during an approaching wildfire. Modifying the fuels around a home is critical to reduce the risk of losing structures during a wildfire. Photo: CSFS*



Figure 29: *This house survived the Fourmile Canyon Fire in 2010. Photo: CSFS*



Figure 30: *Firefighters were able to save this house during the 2012 Weber Fire because the homeowners had a good defensible space. Photo: Dan Bender, La Plata County*

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