



The Fire-Safe Home and Yard

In case of emergency dial 9-1-1



2101 "H" Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301

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Wildfire is a concern for our community.

Grass and brush fires in our urban interface areas pose a serious threat to life and property. The BFD urges all homeowners to incorporate these fire safety measures. Following these generally accepted practices may improve your chances of saving your home and family during a fire.

Roof

Wood shake roofs are a significant fire hazard and are not allowed in new local construction. New roofs must be non-combustible with no gaps or places for embers to lodge. Curved Spanish tile must have open ends plugged.

Access for Firefighters

Leave access and turnaround space for Firefighters and fire engines, as approved by the Fire Department, to get to back and sides of house. In remote areas this is extremely critical.

Garage door should be tight

Homes may burn during a brush fire because the garage door doesn't close all the way. Roll-down metal doors are better options.

Siding

Non-combustible stucco or stucco over cement building panels is better in areas that abut grass and brush.

Eaves

No eaves and no wood fascia is better. Boxed eaves are next best; the underside covered with fire-resistant material.

Shutters

Fireproof shutters can be closed when fire threatens, to protect glass and interiors in areas that abut grass and brush. Removable panels are another means.

No wood fences

They act like fuses, leading fire to the house. Masonry walls, on the other hand, even low ones, can actually deflect heat and flames.

Set back from slope

Fires race up hillsides, so houses should be as far back from the slope as possible, with nothing overhanging the hill.

Step-back construction

Avoid single, high-walled construction. Step tall buildings back from slope.

No pyrophytes – plants that ignite readily and burn intensely

Certain plants are almost explosive, especially when dry. Junipers, one of the worst, are disastrous when planted under eaves. Do not plant any conifers, including pines and cedars, dense eucalyptus, peppers, bamboo, pampas grass or palms.

No wood decks

It's best to avoid wood decks. Decks of fire-proof materials are acceptable. Be sure the support beams and columns are also protected. Patio overheads are acceptable only if they are open (so firebrands can pass through), made of heavy timbers and do not touch the house.

Swimming pools

If you have a swimming pool, provide access for Firefighters to use as a water supply.

No nooks & crannies

There shouldn't be any place on the house where embers or fire brands can lodge or collect.

Double-glazed windows

Double-glazed windows are much less likely to burst during a fire, and little radiant heat can pass through. Behind conventional windows, consider drapes of fireproof fabrics.

30 foot minimum clearance

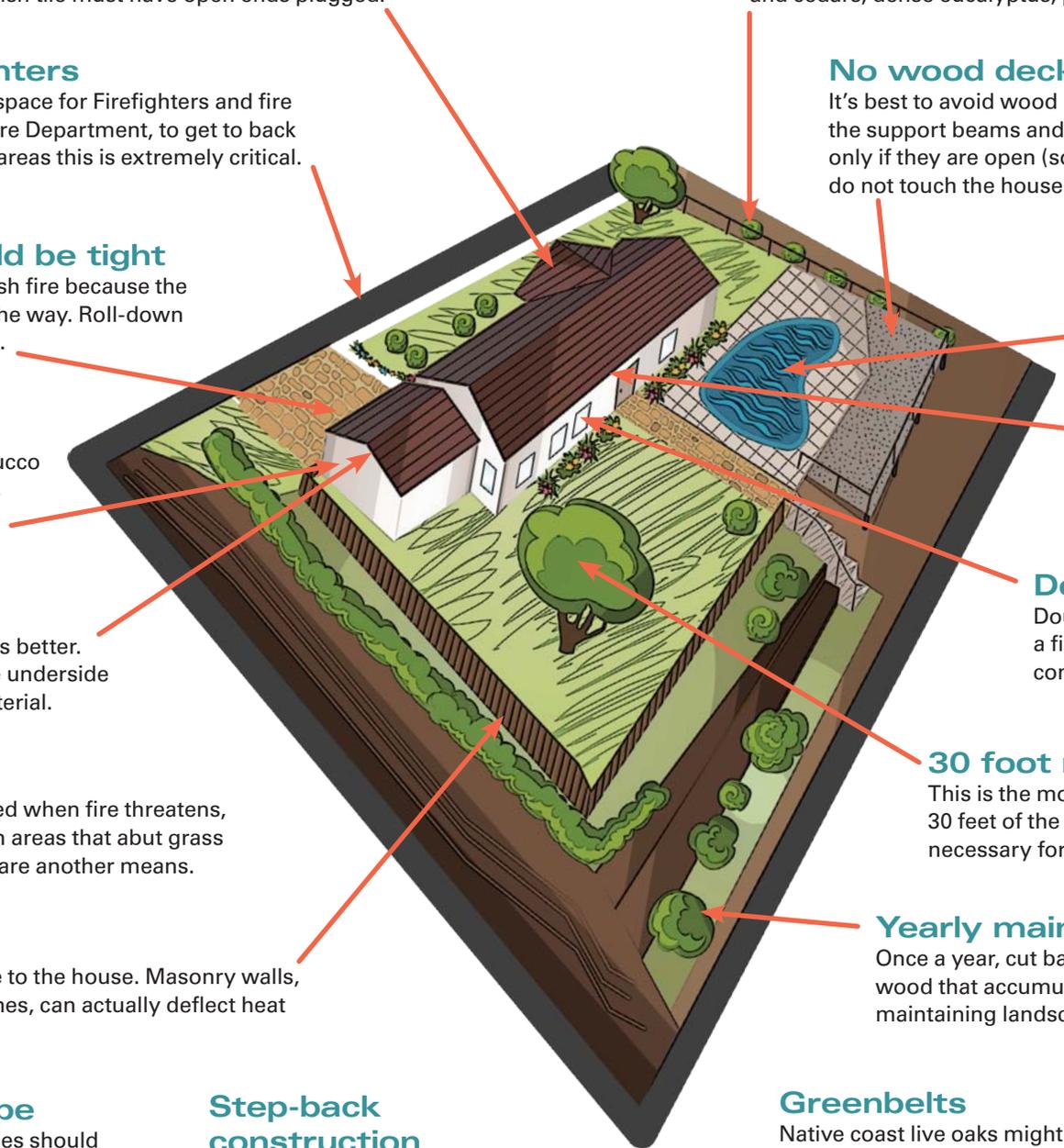
This is the most important rule. No tree or tall shrub should be within 30 feet of the house. An additional 70 feet of reduced fuel area is also necessary for a 100 foot total defensible space.

Yearly maintenance

Once a year, cut back weedy annual grasses and prune and clean up dead wood that accumulates in and under plantings. You cannot forget about maintaining landscapes or they will soon become woody and dangerous.

Greenbelts

Native coast live oaks might make a good greenbelt around properties or subdivisions. They resist fire and drought, have hill-holding root systems and provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.





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Landscape Zoning

One method of landscaping fire prone areas is to divide the property into zones of increasing safety: as plants approach the house, decrease height and volume the closer they are. It's not the plants themselves so much as the arrangement of plants. The idea here is to eliminate "fire ladders" to the house. Some trees and overhanging vegetation can be more flammable than the native vegetation. Keep vegetation away from the house.

Zone 1 0-30 feet from house

Irrigated garden of mostly low-growing plants and lawn. No plants under eaves (if any) and no tall plants closer than 10 feet from house. If it is irrigated regularly, and there are fire-resistant plantings further from the house, you can grow just about anything here.

Zone 2 30-60 feet from house

A greenbelt or living firebreak of the most fire-resistant or fire-retardant plantings, such as rosea or white trailing iceplant, cap weed, snow-in-summer, ivy, geraniums, yarrow, dwarf rosemary, Myoporum parvifolium or the native Ceanothus griseus horizontalis or C. prostratus occidentalis. Several handsome, fire-resistant trees are live oak, western redbud, strawberry tree, toyon, mountain mahogany and carob.

Between Zone 2 and 3 is a good place to try to block fire with deep plantings of particularly fire-resistant plants, such as citrus, oleanders or native live oaks (but not scrub oak).

Zone 3 60-100 feet from house

Topography and relative fire-safeness of the house influence these choices. Use only "knee-high" native and non-native plants that contain little fuel, such as low ceanothus, native monkey flower, bush morning glory, fuchsia-flowering gooseberry, dwarf strawberry tree, white rockrose, photinia, dwarf California coffeeberry, mixed with any of the low-growing ground covers. Try for drought tolerant plants to conserve water and save money. Zone 3 should be like 4, and as much native vegetation should be preserved as possible.

Zone 4 100-200 feet from house, up to 400 feet on north or east slopes

Selectively save native vegetation, while removing the most combustible. Remove all "soft" chaparral, especially chamisa, buckwheat and sage. Try to preserve a continuous canopy of foliage (to prevent erosion), but remove all dead material ("fine, dead, aerial fuel") from inside the plants.

Remove branches from the bottom third of plant. On steep hillsides, consult with an engineer or landscape architect or serious erosion can occur. Anything that grows back between or under plantings should be cut to 3 inches tall when it turns brown.

Bakersfield FIRE Department

2101 "H" Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301 (661) 326-3911