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NEWS RELEASE

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Approves First-in-the-Nation Zone 0 Defensible Space Regulations

The new policy reflects extensive public input and provides a balanced, phased approach to wildfire safety and local needs to better protect homes, neighborhoods, and California communities.



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August 19, 2026

Sacramento, CA — The [California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection](#) today approved the [final draft of Zone 0 defensible space regulations](#), marking another critical step in the state’s ongoing effort to better protect homes and communities from wildfire.

Directed by legislation including Assembly Bill 3074 (2020), Senate Bill 504 (2024), Assembly Bill 1455 (2025), and Governor Gavin Newsom’s Executive Order N-18-25 in 2025, the new regulation adds to California’s growing list of [wildfire resilience efforts](#) and focuses on practical wildfire safety actions for the first five feet around homes and structures—an area where professional experience and research indicate that homes are most vulnerable to ignition from embers.

The new regulation was informed by extensive public input and reflects a practical approach that empowers homeowners and local governments to take action.

“The area defined in this regulation is the most critical zone for protecting a home, and neighborhoods, during a wildfire,” said **Board Chair Terry O’Brien**. “We’ve taken a thoughtful, science-based approach to develop standards that will meaningfully reduce risk while still being practical for homeowners. I applaud the hard work of the Board and the commitment and engagement of many to finalize this rule package.”

A Refined Approach Built on Public Input and Fire Safety

Over the past fifteen months, the Board has conducted extensive outreach, including research and public comment review, and nearly a combined twenty public workshops, community site visits and walking tours, and on-the-ground engagement with homeowners, fire professionals, environmental groups, and local governments.

The process surfaced multiple perspectives from different regions of the state on how to address flammable materials located in Zone 0—with particular attention to trees and other living vegetation commonly in the area surrounding the first five feet outside a home.

To help facilitate this discussion, a [subcommittee of the Board](#) took input and consolidated different approaches into a series of recommendations. Now, the final set of rules approved by the Board today incorporate a range of viewpoints, statutory requirements, and considerations for implementation such as affordability, enforcement, and local flexibility.

“We’ve heard valuable input from all corners of the state and have worked hard to draft policy that threads the needle across a very complex set of mandates, risks, and values,” said **Tony Andersen, Executive Officer** for the Board.

actually work on the ground and in neighborhoods.”

What the New Zone 0 Rules Require

The approved policy includes a phased-in implementation approach that prioritizes education and outreach over a 5-year period. While Zone 0 requirements will apply to new construction upon adoption of the regulation, existing homes and structures can implement actions in phases over time within different areas of Zone 0:

- **PHASE 1 (Implemented within the first 3 years):** Includes removing combustible items such as firewood, dead leaves and branches, mulch, and wood chips within 5 feet of the structure. Cleaning gutters, removing dead and dying plants, trimming trees according to regulations, and implementing or adjusting for allowable vegetation during this time period.
- **PHASE 2 (Implemented within 5 years):** Local jurisdictions will assign a timeline, within 5 years of the effective date of the regulations, for the creation of an under-eave safety zone, replacing combustible gates, and making any necessary adjustments to sheds and fencing.

The policy applies to homes only in the [State Responsibility Area \(SRA\) and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones](#) in Local Responsibility Areas (LRA).

At a high level, the policy involves two distinct areas within the first five feet of a structure (see images below for more information):

- **A low-combustibility zone** extending out from an area immediately next to the home, or the area under eaves, to the remaining portion of the five feet that comprises Zone 0—or roughly an area of four feet depending on a structure’s eave size.
- **A non-combustible immediate “safety zone”** directly next to the home and under eaves. This zone width flexes with the width of the eave. For example, if the structure has one-foot eaves, the safety zone is one foot in width. If the structure has two-foot eaves, the safety zone is two feet in width.

This nested approach is designed to protect the most vulnerable parts of a structure—such as the base of the wall, windows, decks, and eaves—while still allowing for flexibility based on the attributes of the home or structure.

Vegetation and Landscaping Are Allowed, With Conditions

- No combustible materials (like bark mulch, dead leaves, wood chips, or firewood) are allowed within Zone 0, including on roofs and in gutters. Dead and dying vegetation is not allowed and the area should be regularly cleaned.

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line”);

- Where the eaves are shallow, a safety zone of 1 foot is still required. Vegetation is not allowed within two feet of windows, doors, and vents, and within five feet of attached decks or similar deck-like features.
- Well-maintained herbaceous plants and flowers are allowed outside these buffers within Zone 0, with the following conditions:
 - Smaller non-woody plants, such as bulbs, poppies, petunias, and succulents are allowed in spaced groupings;
 - Low ground covers, such as moss, beach strawberries, and creeping thyme are allowed per requirements;
 - Grass or lawn is allowed but must be maintained per requirements;
 - Potted plants in easily movable non-combustible containers are allowed.

Trees Are Allowed, With Conditions

- Trees are allowed, but must be maintained:
 - Branches should be ten feet from chimneys per existing statute. Branches should also be trimmed five feet above roofs and trimmed so that they are not under eaves.
 - Dead wood and lower branches or “ladder fuels” that could carry fire upward should be removed. Limbs should be removed from the bottom six feet for large trees, or from the lower third of the tree for smaller trees.

Fences, Gates, and Structures in Zone 0

- A five-foot non-combustible section is required where fences attach to a home, to be completed in Phase 2. Examples could include replacing the combustible gate with a non-combustible metal gate.
- No new combustible fences or gates should be built within Zone 0, but repairs can be made to existing fences.
- Any sheds and outbuildings within Zone 0 must have non-combustible exterior roofs and walls.

Allowances for Local Conditions

Recognizing California’s diverse landscapes and communities, the new policy also allows local communities to implement alternative approaches—provided that they achieve equivalent fire safety outcomes. Using a range of decision-making factors, communities can also choose more stringent standards based on their individual fire safety hazard or risk. These local alternatives are to be coordinated or drafted with their local fire agency and require approval by the local jurisdiction, such as a city council or county board.

“This isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach,” **O’Brien** added. “We’ve built in flexibility so that local experts can tailor solutions unique to their individual communities while maintaining meaningful fire safety standards.”

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The Board has emphasized that implementation will prioritize education and outreach—not penalties—as this regulation is implemented. For new construction, compliance with this regulation is required upon approval by the California Secretary of State. Existing homes will then be phased in during two phases outlined above, with early adoption always being recommended.

The goal is to give homeowners time, resources, and guidance to make changes effectively and affordably.

Continued Public Engagement, Public Assistance Planning, and Next Steps

The Board will continue to support a range of legislative proposals, tax savings offers, bond funding, grants, local funding mechanisms, service organizations, volunteer events, and other resources and assistance committed to supporting communities and implementing this regulation.

“Extensive public feedback, professional expertise, and communities willing to roll up their sleeves have been essential to getting us to this point, and it will continue to shape the coming years,” said **Andersen**. “We encourage everyone—homeowners, local agencies, and community members—to stay engaged, to organize community action and events, and to help your neighbors.”

State and Local Officials Weigh In

“Creating the nation’s first Zone 0 regulation took more than 15 months of hard work, honest conversations, and a shared commitment to finding practical solutions for Californians,” said **Board member Elicia Goldsworthy, who also served on the Zone 0 Regulations Advisory Committee**. “Adding Zone 0 to our existing defensible space regulation is a demonstration of how we close the gap on our most challenging and urgent policy work, understanding that this is deeply personal for millions of California homeowners as it addresses the conditions immediately adjacent to their homes and outdoor living spaces. Thanks to the dedication of our Board, community members, and partners across the state, we have made the kind of progress that allows for a balance of personal choices with community safety. And we’ve taken one more important step to help make our communities safer and more resilient to wildfire.”

“As someone who has spent more than 40 years in fire prevention, protection, suppression, and ecosystem management, I can tell you the first five feet around a home is where we win or lose against embers,” said **Board member J. Lopez, who also served on the Zone 0 Regulations Advisory Committee**. “These standards are practical steps: clean roofs and gutters, removing combustibles near walls and under eaves, and maintaining trees and plants that measurably cut ignition risk with achievable actions homeowners can securely implement. They also support firefighter operations by improving

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flexibility to get this right, while allowing local governments to tailor solutions to their landscapes. This is about safety, protecting lives and neighborhoods, strengthening resilience block-by-block, and doing it in a way that homeowners can implement.”

"Research continues to demonstrate that during a wildfire, homes and buildings are extremely vulnerable to the embers that accumulate within the first five feet of a home," said **Chief Daniel Berlant, California State Fire Marshal**. "Establishing the Zone Zero 5-foot safety zone is an essential step in strengthening California's wildfire preparedness. We all have a role to play in protecting lives, homes, and the firefighters who rush in to defend them. Zone Zero is an action that supports this effort and ultimately, helps protect the places we cherish most."

"For communities across the state, wildfire preparedness isn't theoretical — it's personal. We've seen the destruction wildfire can cause, and we've also seen the importance of taking practical steps to reduce risk before a fire starts," said **Anne Cottrell, Napa County Supervisor**. "The Board of Forestry's adoption of Zone 0 defensible space regulations provides an important statewide baseline for protecting homes and strengthening community resilience. As we continue our own local wildfire preparedness efforts, these standards will be another valuable tool to help keep our communities safer."

"Reducing fire risk in Zone Zero is a key piece of the Governor's Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan," said **Patrick Wright, director of the Governor's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force**. "Today's approval strengthens our collective efforts to protect homes, communities, and lives from wildfire."

"After 25 years as a firefighter, I've learned that defensible space isn't just a requirement, it's a promise we make to our communities," said **Chief John Morgan, Assistant Deputy Director for Community Wildfire Prevention and Risk Reduction, CAL FIRE**, and a lead member of the Zone 0 planning team. "I'm proud to support the Board of Forestry's leadership in advancing these vital Zone 0 protections as we look ahead to a safer and more prepared California."

"We learned through tragedy in Paradise in 2018, Los Angeles in 2025 and so many other communities over the past decade, that the home ignition zone is critical to reducing losses from wildfire to Californians and their communities," said **Michael Wara, Senior Fellow, Woods Institute for the Environment, Stanford University**. "The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's rule today is the most important step made nationally on this issue and is a big step forward. Now every Californian, myself included, needs to step up and do our share of the work to make our homes and gardens safer from wildfire."

"I've spent 36 years fighting these fires and walking the aftermath, and everything I've seen points to and agrees with the science: the risk starts in the

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that science, and Californians will be safer for it."

"California is taking a big step toward making more homes resilient when catastrophic wildfire strikes," said **Eric Horne, California Director, Megafire Action**. "Today's rule is grounded in science, practical for homeowners, and strengthened by the voices of Californians who helped shape it. We commend the Board of Forestry for putting forward a thoughtful standard that will meaningfully reduce wildfire risk and help protect more homes."

Before becoming law, the adopted regulation package will be submitted to the Office of Administrative Law for review before being officially approved and published by the California Secretary of State. During this review, a five-day public comment period will be provided. Information on the final rule package can be accessed [here](#) shortly.

- **READ:** The [Summary Sheet and final draft regulation](#) for more information, including example images. Or review all August meeting materials [here](#).
- **WATCH:** A previous [explainer video](#) outlining the final adopted regulation and what's included.

About the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection

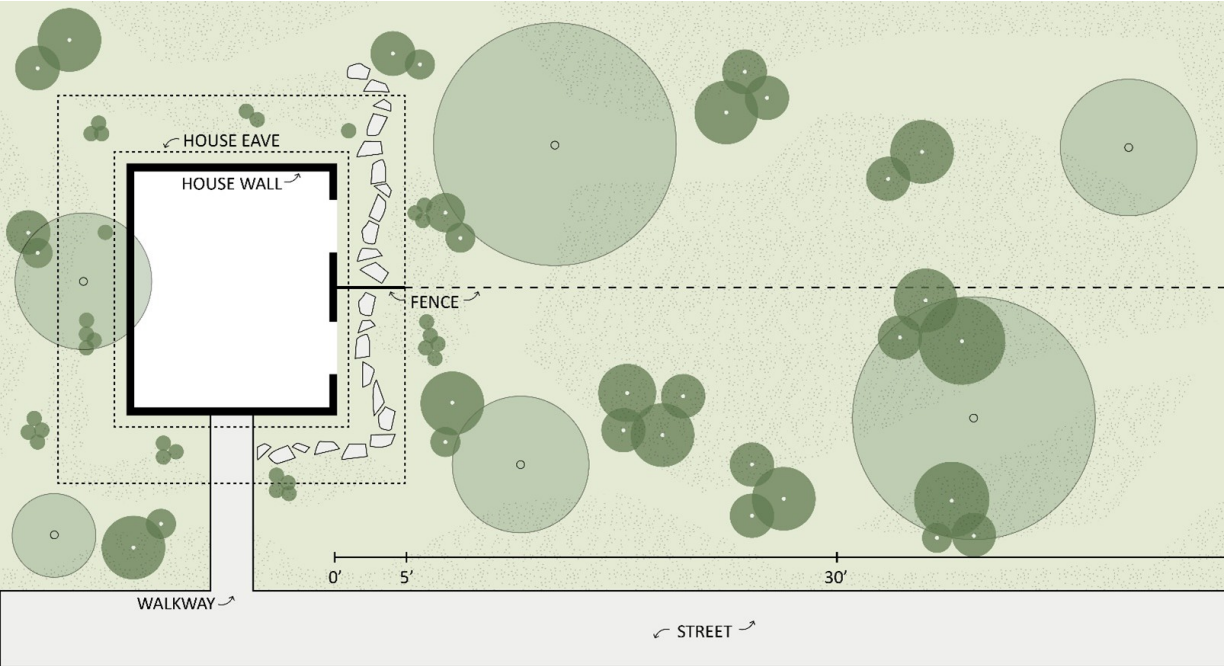
The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is responsible for developing and overseeing forest policy and wildfire regulations in California, with a mission to protect the state's forests, watersheds, and communities.

For more information, please email: PublicComments@bof.ca.gov

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