



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DEFENSIBLE SPACE

As the number of people living in and adjacent to the wildland urban interfaces grows, the likelihood of homes being threatened by wildfire also grows. A critical factor in determining whether or not a home will survive a wildfire is the type, amount, and maintenance of vegetation surrounding the house. In the 1980's, the term "defensible space" was coined to describe vegetation management practices aimed at reducing the wildfire threat to homes. This article responds to some of the commonly asked questions about defensible space.

### WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space refers to that area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat and to provide an opportunity for firefighters to effectively defend the house. Sometimes, a defensible space is simply a homeowner's properly maintained backyard.

### WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEGETATION AND WILDFIRE THREAT?

Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. In terms of wildfire, what is growing adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their houses. All vegetation, including naturally occurring native plants and ornamental plants in the residential landscape, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the amount of heat reduced. All of which assist

### HOW DO I CHANGE THE VEGETATION ON MY PROPERTY TO REDUCE THE WILDFIRE THREAT?

The objective of defensible space is to reduce the wildfire threat to a home by changing the characteristics of the adjacent vegetation. Defensible space practices: \* Increase the moisture content of vegetation \* Decrease the amount of vegetation \* Shorten plant height \* Alter the arrangement of plants This is accomplished through the "Three R's of Defensible Space".

## THE THREE R's OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE

**REDUCTION:**  
**REPLACEMENT:**  
**REMOVAL:**

This technique involves the elimination of entire plants, particularly trees and shrubs, from the site. Examples of removal would be the cutting down of a dead tree or the cutting out of a combustible shrub. The removal of plant parts, such as branches or leaves, constitutes reduction. Examples of reduction are pruning dead wood from a shrub, removing low tree branches, and mowing dried grass. Replacement is the substitution of less flammable plants for more hazardous vegetation. For example, removal of a dense stand of flammable shrubs and planting an irrigated, well-maintained flowerbed would be a type of replacement.

DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE A LOT OF BARE GROUND IN MY LANDSCAPE?