

Vacant Land Vegetation Management Ordinance

Regulations Pertaining to Unimproved Properties

In order to help enhance the effectiveness of PRC 4291 requirements and add to the safety of our homes, families, communities and the safety of Firefighters trying to protect homes and property from wildfires, *Scotts Valley Fire Protection District Ordinance 2022-1* **Section 304.1.2** extends the **Reduced Fuel Zone** concept to the **unimproved** (vacant) subdivision parcels or lots.

The purpose of extending the Reduced Fuel Zone concept to unimproved lots and parcels is based on the premise that modifying the fuel load on a vacant lot or parcel will help keep a wildfire from intensifying as it moves. This modification on a vacant lot or parcel reduces heat intensity, reduces flame length and helps keep flames from spreading from the ground to the tree tops.

Scotts Valley Fire Protection District Ordinance 2022-1 **Section 304.1.2** covers:

- Unimproved lots or parcels within established subdivisions.
- An unimproved lot or parcel that is outside the boundaries of a subdivision but adjacent to improved parcels within the subdivision.
- Modification requirements for unimproved parcels or lots are the same as Cal-Fire's PRC 4291 requirements for the Reduced Fuel Zone.

The following criteria/explanation has been established so the property owner and the hired worker will know what is required to bring an unimproved lot or parcel into compliance with *Scotts Valley Fire Protection District Ordinance 2022-1* **Section 304.1.2**.

The primary goal of our fuel reduction program is to keep fire from going from the GROUND to the CROWN of trees. Information below will help you achieve that goal.

Cut down and remove dead trees. Remove limbs on cut and already downed trees and dispose of both properly.

If there are standing dead trees, they must be cut down. Newly cut trees and those which have fallen must be cut up and stacked or removed from the lot entirely. Do not stack next to or under live trees. Branches from these trees may NOT be left on the ground – they must be removed from the lot. Dead trees are both a fire and safety hazard. Contact your local forester for details about bug infested trees.

Remove dead branches and trees which are leaning into or against larger trees.

If dead branches or dead trees are leaning into or against live trees, they must be removed. Any trees, live or dead, that have fallen into other trees, (ex: "leaners") must be dropped to the ground, cut up and stacked or removed from the lot. Dead branches and trees ignite quickly. If the "fire ladder" has not been eliminated, a fire within those trees will quickly "climb" the ladder of limbs and begin spreading faster, gaining heat and momentum with every tree consumed.

Remove and dispose of all dead tree limbs within six feet of the ground. You may be required to limb higher depending on slope of land.

The primary goal of our fuel reduction program is to keep fire from going from the GROUND to the CROWN of trees. Remove ALL dead tree limbs that are within six feet of the ground. This means that if ANY PORTION of the dead limb HANGS within six feet of the ground, the limb MUST be removed. Live limbs that hang closer than six feet to the ground must be removed. If there is a slope to the property, you may be requested to limb higher, so there are six feet of clearance between the ground and the first set of branches. If you are six feet tall and can walk under the tree without bending, you have limbed high enough. Properly dispose of limbs by hauling, chipping or by burning following legally established burning restrictions.

Remove dead branches on ground.

During most winters, dead branches are blown from trees. These must be removed from the ground so that they do not help fuel a fire and for the safety of the firefighter.

Remove all dead brush and brush growing under trees and bushes, such as manzanita, Scotch or French Broom, and Chamise. Dead brush, whether under trees, bushes, or lying on the ground, is fire fuel. The more fire fuel, the hotter the fire and more damage to trees and nearby structures will occur. Maintain a vertical clearance space of at least 3 times the height of a shrub between any shrub and overhanging tree branch.

As an example, if an entire Manzanita bush is dead, REMOVE THE ENTIRE BUSH. If a portion of the bush is dead, you may opt to remove only the dead portion. If a few limbs are dead, removal of those dead limbs from that bush may be sufficient, depending on what is around or above the brush/bush.

Remove accumulations of dead materials and/or flammable ground vegetation from underneath and within manzanita and other brush.

This type of debris occurs because of weather. Wind causes limbs to break, dead pine needles to blow off the trees. This is typical “winter fall”. If this debris is not removed yearly, it continues to accumulate and cause a fire hazard. If this is removed yearly, it is usually not much of a chore to keep the fire fuel controlled on your lot. Piles of debris must not be left on your lot – they must be removed.

Thin manzanita.

Manzanita is highly flammable and volatile. If you wish to keep your manzanita, you must: remove all dead branches; clear around the bush, or clump of bushes. A simple guideline is to create space between plants equal to their height.

If manzanita is growing under a tree, and it was to catch on fire, the flames would be three times the length of the plant. If a plant was 6 feet tall, the flame length would be 18 feet! The manzanita should be removed, or the tree limbed at least 18 feet.

Accumulations and/or piles of dead and dying material must be removed.

Remove all debris lying on ground. When needles, grass, cones and leaves are raked into piles, the piles must be removed. Piles of debris are fuels that will carry a small, manageable fire and spread it throughout a lot and into the trees very rapidly. Downed wood and debris become kindling for a fire. Limbs will create flame lengths that carry fire into brush and trees. 3” – 4” of accumulated pine needles may be left on the lot forming a “carpet of needles” which helps hold moisture in the ground and helps prevent soil erosion. If the “fire ladder” has been

removed, the pine needles are more easily managed because there is no fire ladder to carry the flames into the trees. A **FIRE LADDER** is the means by which a fire travels from the ground via flammable material, into a tree. Fire traveling to the top of a tree is called “**crowning**”. Remove ladder fuels such as tree limbs, to a height of at least six feet. A SIX FOOT TALL PERSON SHOULD BE ABLE TO WALK FREELY UNDER YOUR TREES.

Remove All Dead Or Live Brush From Within Trees

Dead or live Brush removal and removal of debris from under trees slows the progression of fire.

Remove dead and/or dying smaller trees growing under and/or within the limbs of taller healthy trees.

This could act as a “fire ladder”. These small, dying or dead trees are extremely flammable. If they are ignited, they carry fire very quickly into the trees, gaining heat and momentum with every tree consumed.

Thin saplings and/or small trees.

All of these saplings will not grow to maturity and they create ladder fuels that endanger the health of mature trees.

On parcels with uninterrupted low growing vegetation, create a fuel break around the perimeter of the parcel by cutting the ground vegetation to a height of no more than 4” from within 30 feet of the property line(s).

On parcels with “uninterrupted” ground cover vegetation, an area of at least thirty feet along each property line must be cut to a height not to exceed 4 inches, especially along property lines adjacent to other properties with a house and/or properties that are upslope. If the ground cover is growing uninterrupted, you should create “islands” of groupings with areas cleared of ground cover between each grouping.

Cut ALL dead and/or dying grass and weeds.

Dry, cut grass, leaves and pine needles may stay on the ground, but may be no more than 3 – 4 inches deep.

IN ADDITION TO THE FOREGOING CRITERIA, if large areas of brush MUST be reduced. This can be accomplished in several ways:

- Create cleared areas or “spaces” around individual bushes. The size of the cleared area around the bush needs to equal the height of the bush that will remain. All flammable debris in that area must be removed. Leaving a pattern of bushes with space between them can be done throughout an entire parcel.
- Create “islands” of bushes. Numerous bushes can remain on the parcel in a group with a cleared area around the grouping. The cleared area must equal the diameter of the grouping or “island” of bushes.
- Create fuel breaks along property lines and within properties, especially along property lines which are adjacent to property with a home and properties which are upslope.

These fuel breaks can be accomplished by removing all brush along a 30 foot strip, property line to property line. Properly dispose of all cut brush by hauling, chipping or by burning following legally established burning restrictions.

All cut and/or downed debris shall be disposed of by Hauling, Chipping, Burning (following legally established burning restrictions). At NO TIME shall debris be buried on the parcel, deposited on the property of another, dumped into holes on the parcel, covered by pine needles or leaves, or deposited down an embankment or hillside.

Before burning always call the **Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District at (831) 647-9411** for current information and regulations.

Under certain conditions, i.e. topography or fuel type, the Scotts Valley Fire Protection District may require more or less fuel reduction on one parcel than on another.