



SAN DIEGO FIRE-RESCUE COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION DIVISION

STANDARD TITLE	STANDARD NUMBER
MITIGATION FOR REDUCED FUEL MODIFICATION ZONES	D-1
EFFECTIVE DATE: 04/06/2018	REVISION DATE: 04/22/2026

I. BACKGROUND

The establishment of fuel modification zones has proven to be a major factor in reducing the probability of structures igniting from wildfires. When combined with special building construction features, the potential for ignition is further reduced.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard is to clarify the requirements for proposing alternative compliance utilizing additional mitigation efforts to building construction or site modifications when 100 feet of defensible space can't be provided for construction in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).

III. SCOPE

This standard shall apply to new structures or additions/remodels located in any fire hazard severity zone that can't meet the defensible space requirements in section §512.0603 (f) of the San Diego Municipal Code.

IV. DEFINITIONS

DEFENSIBLE SPACE: The buffer that a responsible person is required to create or maintain on property between a structure and the plants, brush, and trees or other items surrounding the structure that could ignite in the event of a fire.

FUEL MODIFICATION ZONES: A strip of land where combustible vegetation has been thinned or modified, or both, and may be partially or totally replaced with approved fire-smart or irrigated plants, or both, to provide an acceptable level of risk from vegetation fires. Fuel modification reduces the radiant and convective heat on a structure and provides valuable defensible space for firefighters to make an effective stand against an approaching fire front.

STRUCTURE: Any habitable building designed primarily for human occupancy including for residential, commercial, educational, and industrial uses and accessory buildings adjacent thereto that form a means of transmitting fire to the habitable building.

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE AREAS: A geographical area identified by the state as a "Fire Hazard Severity Zone" in accordance with Public Resources Code sections 4201 through 4204 and California Government Code sections 51175 through 51189, and other areas designated by the City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department to be at significant risk from wildfires.

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V. REQUIRMENTS FOR ALTERNATIVE COMPLIANCE

Fuel modification zones shall extend for a distance not less than 100 feet from all portions of a structure to provide an effective fire break between all structures and contiguous areas of native or naturalized vegetation. Where a minimum of 100 feet cannot be provided, an applicant may request approval of alternative compliance if all of the following conditions exist:

- A. The proposed alternative compliance provides sufficient defensible space between all structures on the premises and contiguous areas of native or naturalized vegetation as demonstrated to the satisfaction of the fire code official based on documentation that addresses the topography of the site, existing and potential fuel load, and other characteristics related to fire protection and the context of the proposed development.
- B. The proposed alternative compliance includes additional mitigation efforts to building construction or other site modifications to address the lack of defensible space.
- C. The proposed alternative compliance is not detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare of persons residing or working in the area.

VI. MINIMUM REQUIRMENTS FOR DEFENSIBLE SPACE

- A. A 5-foot non-combustible zone (Zone 0) must extend a minimum of 5 feet from the structure.
- B. The combined width of zone 0 and zone 1 shall not be less than 15 feet and shall be mostly flat with a slope not exceeding 25%.
- C. The fuel modification zones shall provide a minimum of 30 feet of defensible space between the structure and areas containing native and naturalized vegetation. When a minimum of 30 feet of defensible space cannot be provided a technical report must be submitted following the requirements of Section VII.B.

Note: Reduced fuel modification zones are not allowed per request of the customer. Projects must comply with landscape reviews determination of how much zone 1 and zone 2 can be provided per landscape regulations.

VII. MITIGATION

A. Building Construction Features

Where the full 100-foot fuel modification zone cannot be provided as required by SDMC 512.0603 additional mitigation efforts to building construction may be proposed, including but not limited to the following:

1. 6' block wall on the brush side of the structure(s);
2. Dual-glazed/dual-tempered windows;
3. A reduction of exposed windows on the side of the structure with setback less than 30 feet;
4. Attic or exterior sprinklers;
5. Increased fire resistance rating of exterior wall/walls; or
6. Brush management easement from abutting private property.

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B. Performance Based Design – Technical Report

A technical report may be utilized to propose a performance-based design and should include mitigation measures described in VII. A. Technical reports are required for all projects where a minimum of 30’ of defensible space cannot be provided and must include the following:

1. A detailed technical fire behavior analysis report by a qualified wildland fire behavior professional is required (qualifications of the professional must be approved by SDFD prior to their design). The report shall include BehavePlus fuel modeling outputs at a minimum.
2. A one to two-page Alternative Methods and Material Request (AMMR) letter to SDFD must be submitted with the detailed technical report. The report and letter shall be drafted by the fire behavior professional and submitted with the plans.
3. The applicant shall propose compensating factors to demonstrate equivalency to the full required widths of the defensible space zone.