



SAN DIEGO FIRE-RESCUE COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION DIVISION

| STANDARD TITLE | | STANDARD NUMBER |
|---|----------------|-----------------|
| ZONE 0 REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW STRUCTURES | | D-2 |
| EFFECTIVE DATE: 02/28/2026 | REVISION DATE: | |

I. **BACKGROUND**

Wind-driven embers are responsible for most home ignitions during wildfires. Vegetation and other combustible materials on or immediately adjacent to structures are highly susceptible to ember ignition. Zone 0 establishes an ember-resistant zone by restricting combustible materials within 5 feet of structures.

II. **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this standard is to clarify the Zone 0 defensible space regulations established in San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC) section §512.0604 affecting the area within 5 feet of structures.

III. **SCOPE**

These requirements apply to all structures or additions to structures located in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) applying for a building permit on or after February 28, 2026. Additions which increase the building footprint by more than 50% must establish zone 0 in compliance with this standard for the entire structure; otherwise, existing structures or portions of structures must comply with [Zone 0 Guidelines for Existing Structures](#).

IV. **DEFINITIONS**

FIRE SMART VEGETATION. Plants, shrubs, trees, and other vegetation that exhibit properties, such as high moisture content, little accumulation of dead vegetation, and low sap or resin content, that make them less likely to ignite or contribute heat or spread flame in a fire. Fire-smart vegetation may include both native and ornamental species when their growth characteristics and maintenance reduce ignition potential.

FUEL MODIFICATION ZONE. 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.

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HAZARDOUS FIRE AREA. Any land which is covered with native and naturalized vegetation including grass, grain, brush or forest (i.e. Brush Management Area), whether privately or publicly owned, or which is so situated or is of such inaccessible location that a fire originating upon such land would result an abnormally difficult job of suppression or would result in great and unusual damage through fire or resulting erosion.

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. A structure, for the purpose of determining an ember-resistant zone, also includes an attached deck, stairs, or pergola, but does not include patios made of non-combustible materials. For the purposes of this standard, an attached deck, stairs, or pergola includes those that are self-supporting and within 1 foot of the occupied structure.

VEGETATION. All plants, including trees, shrubs, grass, and perennial or annual plants.

ZONE 0. The area immediately adjacent to the exterior wall surface, attached deck, stairs or pergola, extending 5 feet on a horizontal plane, or to the property line, whichever comes first.

V. **REQUIREMENTS**

A. Landscape Plans: Landscape plans shall be provided for any new construction of or additions to structures located in or adjacent to a hazardous fire area. Landscape plans must contain the following:

1. Delineation of the 5-foot, 30-foot and 100-foot fuel modification zones from all structures.
2. Identification of existing vegetation to remain and proposed new vegetation.
3. Identification of irrigated areas
4. A plant legend with both botanical and common names, and identification of all plant material symbols.
5. Identification of all hardscapes within the 100-foot (30 480 mm) fuel modification zone from all structures.
6. Identification of all slope grade breaks between fuel modification zones: 0-20%, 20-40%, and over 40%.

All new structures shall comply with zone 0 regulations whether landscape plans are specifically required to be submitted or not.

B. Plants and Shrubs: Zone 0 is intended to function as a non-combustible ember-resistant area. Vegetation and other combustible materials within 5 feet of a structure are prohibited unless specifically allowed under the following limited conditions:

1. All vegetation shall be fire smart.
2. Combustible materials including mulch or wood chips shall not be used.
3. Plants in zone 0 shall be well watered and provided with permanent irrigation.

ZONE 0 REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW STRUCTURES**D-2**EFFECTIVE DATE: **02/28/2026**

REVISION DATE:

4. Vegetation shall not be located within 2 feet of windows, vents, doors or other building openings.
5. Plantings within zone 0 shall comply with the following:
 - a. Non-woody ground covers less than 3 inches tall are permitted
 - b. Non-woody herbaceous plants up to 18 inches tall are permitted if they are in plantings no more than one 1 square foot in area and are separated from other plants by 1.5 times the height of the tallest plant.
 - c. Non-woody plants in pots are permitted if they are in unaffixed, non-combustible pots or containers that are no larger than 5-gallon capacity and are separated by 1.5 times the height of the plant from each other. These plants shall be no greater than 18 inches in height as measured from the soil to the top of the plant.
6. Potted plants exceeding the 5-gallon capacity may be located on exterior podium levels of buildings where such plants are maintained at least 5 feet from the adjacent exterior walls of the structure and 10 feet from building openings.

C. Trees: Trees can increase the risk of fire spreading to a structure if they are planted too close to a structure or other combustible vegetation. Therefore, requirements have been established for the planting of new trees and maintenance existing trees to reduce the risk of fire spread by minimizing ember accumulation and preventing direct flame or radiant heat exposure to the structure as indicated below:

1. The horizontal distance between crowns of new trees and crowns of adjacent trees shall not be less than 10 feet.
2. New trees shall be planted and maintained so that the tree's drip line at maturity is a minimum of 10 feet from any combustible structure.

Exceptions:

- a. No separation distance is required between trees and non-combustible structures including type I,II or IV construction where branches are maintained a minimum of 5 feet from building openings.
 - b. Street trees are permitted to be exempted from spacing requirements from structures that fully comply with Chapter 5 of the California Wildland-Urban Interface Code and trees are approved as part of the landscape plan submitted with the building permit.
3. Existing trees located within 5 feet of a structure may remain in place if the following conditions apply:
 - a. All portions of the tree, other than the trunk, which extend within 10 feet of a structure or the outlet of any chimney, are cut back to provide and maintain the minimum clearance.
 - b. The tree does not present a hazard to the structure as determined by the fire code official.

ZONE 0 REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW STRUCTURES**D-2**EFFECTIVE DATE: **02/28/2026**

REVISION DATE:

D. Fences and Gates: All new fences and gates within zone 0 shall be constructed of non-combustible materials including steel, aluminum, fiber cement boards or masonry.

Pressure impregnated exterior grade fire-retardant-treated wood (FRTW) classified as an ignition resistant building material in accordance with California Wildland-Urban Interface Code section 503.2 may be utilized for fencing within 5 feet of a structure, provided that:

1. It runs parallel to exterior walls.
2. The fence is not less than 4 feet from the structure.
3. Where a fence or gate attaches to a structure, a minimum 5-foot non-combustible transitional span is required.

