

Fire Safety in the Hillside Areas



Developed by:
The City of Colorado Springs
Development Review Enterprise



QUESTION OF BALANCE

For anyone living in the hillside areas of Colorado Springs, the threat of possible wildfire is never far removed. The same trees and Scrub Oak that make our hillsides such an attractive place to live can endanger property and lives in the event of a wildfire. The challenge therefore, is to make homes both attractive and safe. The City's goal in preparing this brochure is to provide homeowners with guidelines to help them live within hillside areas in a manner that is fire safe, yet which protects our natural features.

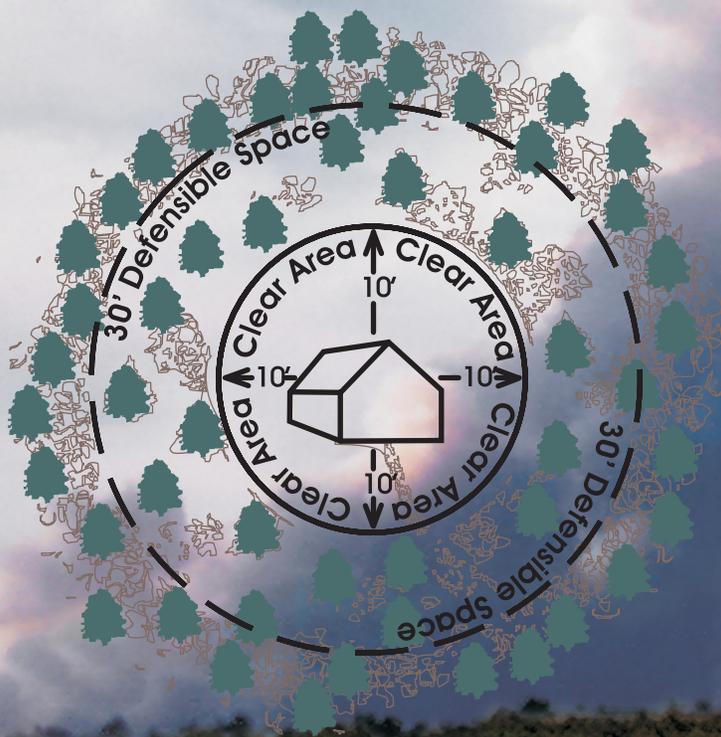
The following recommendations are provided to assist homeowners with wildfire risk reduction:

DO I NEED TO ASK PERMISSION TO REMOVE VEGETATION FROM MY PROPERTY?

No. Although vegetation in hillside areas is protected by City ordinances, these codes also allow for the sensible management of properties to make them fire safe. Normal maintenance and treatment of landscape cover may be conducted without City approvals. If, for example, a section of Scrub Oak has died, it is acceptable to trim back the dead plants in order to reduce the fire hazard and to give the new growth room to grow. Thinning, fuel ladder management and providing separation between stands of vegetation are also allowed. Vegetation that allows a fire to move from lower growing plants to taller ones is referred to as "ladder fuel" and this ladder should be broken by trimming away the shrubs or trees lower branches. Fuels management is appropriate in Preservation Areas. It is not acceptable to remove Scrub Oak or trees simply to increase the size of grass play areas. If you are unsure as to whether vegetation can be removed, please contact the City Planning office at 385-5982.



Thinning the fuel ladder and creating an isolated fuel source



DEFENSIBLE SPACE

The defensible space is considered the area within the first thirty feet surrounding the home. Within the first ten feet of this zone the more combustible types of vegetation such as Scrub Oak, junipers and pine trees should all be removed. In the next twenty feet, clusters of vegetation may remain, but these should be separated by clear areas of ten feet or more. Lower branches of large trees should be pruned to a height of ten feet so that a ground fire is less likely to spread into the crown. Clusters of trees may remain if sufficient clear area is provided between these groupings. Tree branches should not extend over or under the roof eaves and should never be within fifteen feet of a wood-burning chimney. The thirty-foot defensible space does not mean to clear cut the first thirty feet from the house.



MANAGING SCRUB OAK

Scrub Oak naturally grows in clumps or thickets with intervening open spaces. In many cases, these natural openings can be utilized to enhance a home while allowing for defensible space. In cases where Scrub Oak must be removed, cut it low rather than digging it out. This will keep the roots alive which will help to maintain the stability of the slope and minimize erosion. The replacement of Scrub Oak or native trees with alternative species is not encouraged as these substitutes are rarely as well suited to local conditions as the original.

Natural open space between Scrub Oak used to provide a driveway

NATURAL VEGETATION SCREENING

It is important to save existing vegetation in order to maintain the character of our hillside areas. Particular emphasis should be placed on preserving existing vegetation in front yards. Pruning and thinning of this vegetation is acceptable. On heavily vegetated lots where clearing is required, emphasis should be placed on removing smaller and diseased vegetation and saving larger, healthier growth. Evergreen trees over twelve inches in diameter are considered irreplaceable and should not be removed from a lot unless there is no other reasonable option. If these trees are in close proximity to homes or decks, make them an isolated fuels source by trimming away the surrounding shrubs and grass



Save significant trees



Maintain front screening

Useful web sites:

<http://csfd.springsgov.com> (Colorado Springs Fire Department)

<http://www.springsgov.com> (City of Colorado Springs)

<http://www.springsgov.com/Page.aspx?NavID=368> (City Forestry)

<http://www.csu.org/environment/xeriscape/resources/index.html> (Colorado Springs Utilities Xeriscape)