

## Vista Fire Department Fire Safety and Vegetation Management Standards

These guidelines apply to both improved and unimproved land subject to vegetation management in the City of Vista and in the unincorporated portions of San Diego County under the jurisdiction of the Vista Fire Protection District. Authority for this vegetation management is set forth in the 2007 California Fire Code as amended and for the area covered by the Vista Fire Protection District, Ordinances No. 20 and 21 in addition to the County of San Diego 2009 Consolidated Fire Code.

**All parcels are expected to be maintained year round.**

**NOTE: This is Not A Grading Permit!**

Do **NOT** disc or scrape soil with machinery.

### **Annual Grasses and Weeds:**

In general, parcels should only be mowed (per fire department standards listed below). The Fire Chief or his agents may specify the method of clearance for any specific parcel.

#### **Mowing:**

- Mowing is the preferred method of clearing. All standing weeds and dry or dead grass shall be cut to within two (2") inches of the finished soil surface with an approved mechanical mower.
- Mowing shall sever vegetation from its roots, not simply lay it over.
- Additional mowing may be required later in the year due to re-growth. Remember parcels must be maintained year round.
- On parcels less than five (5) acres, dry or dead annual grasses and weeds shall be cut on the entire parcel. This requirement is for annual grasses and weeds only. If you property contains natural brush or vegetation please contact the fire department for guidance.
- Parcels of dry/dead annual grasses or weeds over five (5) acres please contact the fire department for guidance.
- Hand work (weed whacker, whip, string trimmer, etc.) may be required to complete the task on slopes, banks or around obstacles.
- All parcels zoned "industrial" or "commercial" shall be completely mowed regardless of size.

### **Discing and Grading:**

- **Discing and grading is not permitted as a form of vegetation management without the written permission of the Vista Fire Department.** Please contact the Vista Fire Department at 760-643-2801 if believe you have a specific need to disc.

### **Trees:**

For the purpose of this policy, trees are described as woody perennial plants having a single usually elongated main stem generally with few or no branches on its lower part.

- All trees (single species, ornamental, groves, orchards, vineyards, etc.) shall be maintained in a healthy state.
- All dead, dying and diseased trees shall be removed as well as dead branches, foliage and litter. Do not remove the root structure as it helps prevent soil erosion.
- All trimmings, ground litter and under story shall be cleared to mineral soil.
- A mulch layer can be spread underneath the tree's canopy to a height not to exceed six (6) inches.
- A ten (10) foot fuel break (an area cleared of all vegetation) shall encircle all groves, orchards, and vineyards.
- Trees shall be trimmed to eliminate the "ladder fuels." A minimum six (6) foot space shall be maintained between the top of the ground vegetation and the lowest limbs or branches.
- Flammable trees, such as Eucalyptus and pine trees should be removed if possible. If removal is not possible then these trees should be thinned/laced to remove foliage and them maintained in this condition.
- All dead palm and cycad fronds and Yucca leaves including older leaves that persist on the tree, forming a "skirt" or "beard" of brown thatch shall be removed and maintained in a clean state. Palms, especially the Washingtonian Palm (Mexican Fan Palm) are extremely flammable and consideration should be given to removing these trees.
- All leaves, needles and other dead vegetation shall be removed from roofs and gutters.
- Trees shall be trimmed ten (10) feet from all structures.

### **Shrubs:**

A shrub is defined as a low, usually several-stemmed woody plant.

- All shrubbery shall be maintained in a healthy state.
- All nursery plants, either in the ground or pots, shall be maintained in a healthy state. All dead, dying or diseased plants shall be removed.
- Dead or dying branches shall be removed.

- Leaves, needles, fruits and other litter shall be removed from the base of all shrubs. Mulch to a depth of six (6) inches may be applied to the base to facilitate moisture retention and weed prevention.
- Maintain ten (10) feet minimum clearance around all propane tanks.

## **Roads**

A fire access roadway is a road that provides fire apparatus access from a fire station to a facility, building or portion thereof. This is a general term inclusive of all other terms such as driveways, easements, fire lanes, public and private streets, parking lots, lanes and access ways.

Maintain complete clearance along the full length and width of fire access roadways to a vertical height of 13 feet 6 inches.

Along public and private roadways maintain flammable vegetation 20 feet from the edge of the pavement.

## **Flammable Vegetation:**

Areas within the Vista Fire Department jurisdiction shall be cleared of flammable vegetation within thirty (30) feet of all structures using methods such as mowing and trimming or cutting with a chain saw that leave the plant root structure intact to stabilize the soil. Within this zone fire resistive ornamental vegetation is allowed as long as it is maintained in a healthy state. General recommendations for this zone include:

- Low-flammability plants, landscaping materials and accessories
- Prune tree limbs 6 feet from the ground with generous space between trees
- Mow, prune, and water regularly
- No firewood or propane tanks

The zone from 30 feet to 100 feet from all structures shall have the flammable vegetation mass thinned and maintained. General recommendations for this zone include:

- 30 feet between tree clusters
- Prune tree limbs 6 feet from the ground or at least 6 feet above any ground vegetation.
- Remove heavy accumulations of flammable debris
- As a general guideline consider thinning dense flammable vegetation by removing approximately 50% of the fuel in a checkerboard or mosaic pattern. Once this has been accomplished maintain this pattern.

## **Debris Removal:**

All trimmings, plant waste, dead branches, fronds, etc. must be removed from the property and disposed of in an approved manner. Disposal of waste material in stream beds, drainages or left on the property is prohibited and may be subject to citation.

Trimmed vegetative material may be chipped and returned to the property. This material must be spread out to inhibit weed growth, help retain soil moisture and shall not accumulate to a depth greater than six (6) inches. No manure may be added. The objective is to convert the vegetation to a slow burning, low heat release fire and preclude exotic grasses from regeneration.

Burning of agricultural waste material is controlled by the Air Pollution Control District and must follow their guidelines. A burn permit is required for any burning and they are issued by Cal Fire. For information on burning requirements, times of the year burning is permitted or to obtain a burn permit contact Cal Fire at (760) 735-9478 or (760)728-8532.

### **Areas of Environmental Concern:**

For the purposes of these guidelines, environmentally sensitive areas are defined as natural drainages such as creeks, tributaries or streams, seasonal ponds and/or ditches and the habitat (or vegetation) that are within or around these areas. In the Vista area this habitat usually consists of a mix of native (some of which is endangered) and exotic (non-native) vegetation that cleans the storm water and provides food and cover for wildlife. In some areas of the district this habitat is classified as “critical habitat” which means that certain groups of vegetation provide cover and food to threatened or endangered wildlife and must be undisturbed.

Landowners who have environmentally sensitive areas on their property must notify the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at least ten (10) days prior to any vegetation management. Failure of the landowner to provide adequate notification may render the landowner liable under State and Federal Law.

The resource agencies (Fish and Game and Fish and Wildlife), once notified, will have up to ten (10) days to:

1. Determine whether the proposed vegetation management complies with State and/or Federal endangered species requirements.
2. Suggest voluntary, alternative abatement measures if feasible and warranted.

Failure of the resource agencies to respond within ten (10) days will allow the landowner to proceed with abatement activities without delay.

### **General Fire Safety**

- Keep wood piles and flammable materials 30 from structures.
- Consider removing flammable trees such as Eucalyptus, pines, and palms.

- If removal of trees is not possible or desired keep them free from dead material and thinned to reduce fire loading. Remove dead fronds from palms, cycads, and yuccas as necessary.
- Dispose of debris properly. Do not allow flammable material to build up on your property.
- Open burning is prohibited.
- Maintain roofs and gutters free from accumulated debris.
- Create a “fuel free” area around your house that runs one yard out on all sides.
- Keep tree limbs that overhang your house at least 10 feet from the roof and any chimney outlets.