



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Brush Management Regulations

BULLETIN #1:
BRUSH MANAGEMENT GUIDE

The City of San Diego has over 500 linear miles of wildland-urban interface where the back yard of homes meet dense stands of native-naturalized vegetation in canyons and other open space areas. Years of drought have increased the flammability of vegetation and risk for dangerous wildfires to occur. Brush management is needed to reduce fire hazards around structures, and to help firefighters protect life and property when fires do occur.

In addition to protecting the public from fire hazards, the City also has a responsibility to protect sensitive biological resources in canyons and open space areas. Brush management activity must be done in a manner that both reduces fire hazards and minimizes impacts to undisturbed native or naturalized vegetation. It is the responsibility of each homeowner to conduct brush management on their property consistent with San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC) Section 142.0412 and with required protections for environmentally sensitive lands (SDMC Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 1).

This Bulletin generally describes brush management requirements and techniques. **Check with the Fire-Rescue Department or Development Services Department (DSD) before you begin your work to better understand how the requirements apply to a specific piece of property. (Contact information on the back)**

BRUSH MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS (SDMC Section 142.0412)

Any property containing a habitable structure and native or naturalized vegetation is required to provide 100 feet of brush management in two distinct zones: Zone 1 and Zone 2. Special requirements may apply (i.e. pre-1989 development). **Check with Fire-Rescue or DSD before you begin brush management work.**

Brush Management Zone 1 typically extends 35 feet out from the habitable structure towards flammable vegetation, and occurs on the level portion of a property.

- Zone 1 must be maintained on a regular basis by thinning and pruning trees and plants, controlling weeds, and maintaining irrigation systems.
- No habitable structures are permitted. New construction (i.e. fences, walls, palapas, play structures, gazebos, and decks) must be non-combustible and/or have a minimum 1-hour fire resistance rating. Previously conforming structures (legally constructed prior to ordinance) may remain unless they constitute a distinct danger to life or property.
- Plants should be primarily low-growing (less than 4 feet in height), low-fuel, and fire-resistant.
- All portions of trees, other than the trunk, which extend within ten feet of a structure or the outlet of any chimney, must be cut back.
- Trees adjacent to or overhanging any building must be free of dead wood.
- Roof and rain gutters must be free of leaves, needles, or other dead vegetative growth.

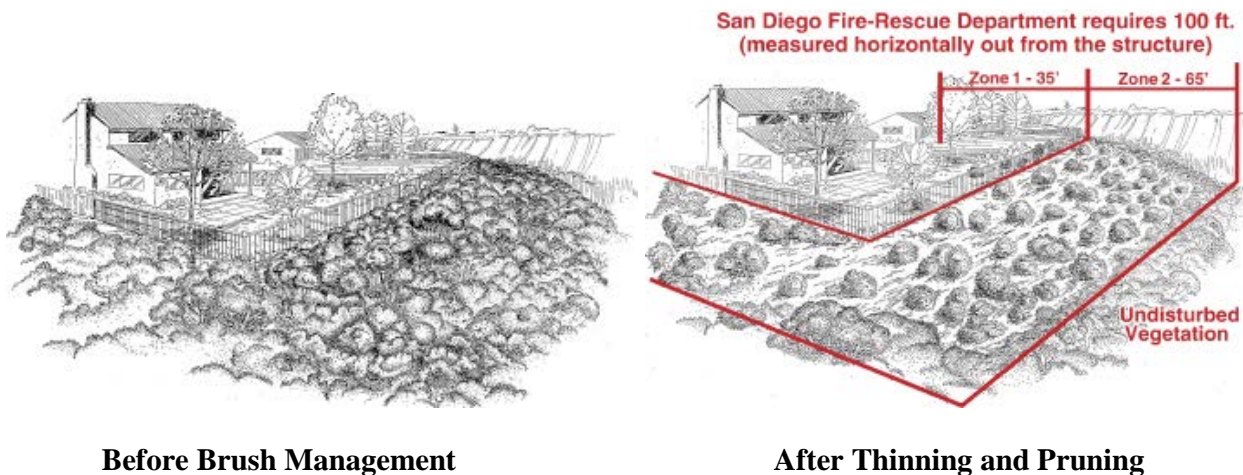
Brush Management Zone 2 is the remaining 65 feet that extends beyond Zone 1, typically comprised of undisturbed vegetation on a slope subject to sensitive biological resource protections.

- Zone 2 must be maintained on a regular basis by controlling weeds and removing invasive species (see back of bulletin under additional information).
- Selective thinning and pruning of native and non-native plants is required to reduce the fuel-load. Do not grade or grub native plants, soils or habitats. Non-native plants must be pruned before native plants. See detailed instructions provided in this Bulletin. Violators will be responsible for restoration and mitigation costs as applicable.
- Brush management activity is not allowed March 1 through August 15 in coastal sage scrub, maritime succulent scrub, or coastal sage-chaparral habitats, unless an exception is specifically granted.
- NO structures or permanent irrigation are allowed in Zone 2.
- A permit is required to re-vegetate or reconfigure Brush Management Zone 2. Failure to obtain the required permits could result in costly corrective action.

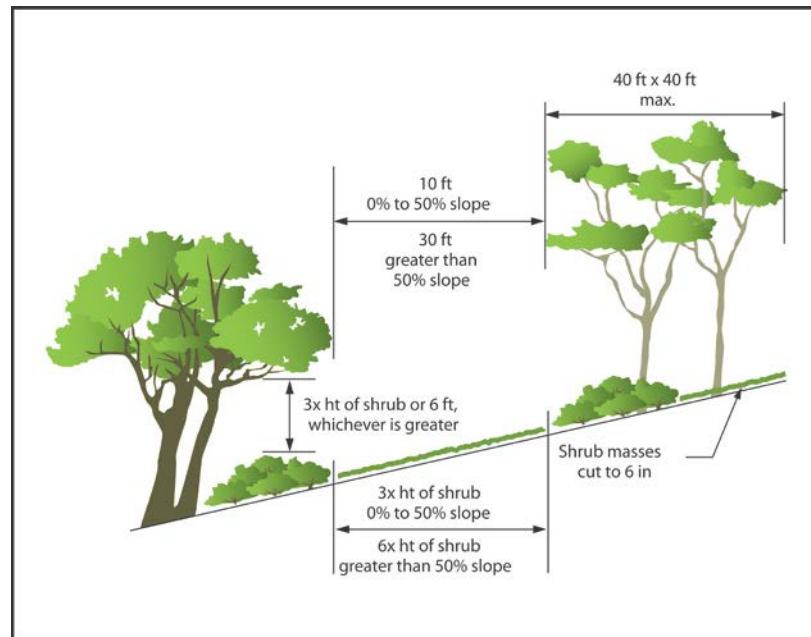
How to Selectively Thin and Prune Plants and Trees in Zone 2 and Avoid Clearing Sensitive Vegetation in Violation of the Code.

Step 1: Remove.... as much dead wood as you can and invasive species within the Brush Management Zone areas.

Step 2: Thin.... the entire Zone 2 area. Start by cutting down 50% of the plants over 2 feet in height to a height of 6 inches. Don't go any lower than 6 inches so the roots remain to control soil erosion. The goal is to create a "mosaic" or more natural look, as shown below, so do your cutting in a "staggered" pattern. Leave uncut plant groupings up to 400 square feet — that's a 20x20-foot area, or an area that can be encircled by an 80-foot rope — separated by groupings of plants cut down to 6 inches. Thinning should be prioritized as follows: 1) invasive non-native species, 2) non-native species, 3) flammable native species, 4) native species, and 5) regionally sensitive species.



Step 3: Prune.... all plants or plant groupings that are left after the thinning process to achieve the horizontal and vertical clearances shown in the illustration below. (For trees in Eucalyptus Woodlands areas, see FPB Policy B-08-1)



Tree and Shrub Spacing

Remaining plants, 4-ft or more in height, should then be cut and shaped into “umbrellas.” This means pruning one half of the lower branches to create umbrella-shaped canopies. This allows you to see and deal with what is growing underneath. Upper branches may then be shortened to reduce fuel load as long as the canopy is left intact. This keeps the plant healthy, and the shade from the plant canopy reduces weed and plant growth underneath. Vegetation that is less than 4 feet in height, like coastal sage scrub, should be cut back to within 12 inches of the root crown.



Chaparral Plant Before Pruning



Chaparral Plant After Pruning

Step 4: Dispose.... of the cuttings and dead wood by either hauling it to a landfill; or, by chipping/mulching it on-site and spreading it out in the Zone 2 area to a depth of not more than 6 inches.

Step 5: Thin & Prune annually.... because plants will grow back.

Additional Information

- Brush/Weed Abatement; use of goats: City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (619) 533-4444. <http://www.sandiego.gov/fire/services/brush/index.shtml>
- Property restrictions (easements, permits, deed or title): County Recorder (619) 237-0502.
- Obtaining permits for brush management on private property with restrictions: City of San Diego Development Services Department (619) 446-5000. <http://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/>
- Brush management on City-owned open space land: City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department, Brush Management Section (619) 685-1350. <http://www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/>
- See Bulletin #2: Use of Goats for Brush Management for an alternative way to thin brush. <http://www.sandiego.gov/fire/pdf/goatspermit.pdf>
- City of San Diego Landscape Standards: Guidance on plant materials (prohibited invasive species) and brush management techniques. <http://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/pdf/industry/standards09.pdf>



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