



Greenhorn Firewise Community

February 2026 Newsletter

Hi Neighbors!

As I sit here with snow falling and blanketing the ground, fire season seems far away. But time flies as we all know.

This month begins our series of three newsletters focusing on off-season work on your home and property—home hardening and defensible space. I know a lot of us have been out doing this work during the past few dry weeks. While we're getting some much-needed rain and snow, you could refer back to the [January newsletter](#) for indoor projects (home inventory, scanning important papers, go bag and family emergency plan updates).

It's also important to note that your defensible space efforts can work to your advantage during winter storms:

- Removing unhealthy trees reduces the risk of them taking out a power line or blocking a road or driveway.
- Clearing out ladder fuel aids utility workers coming in to restore power.
- Roadside vegetation management can provide places for snowplows to push snow (instead of blocking driveways).

Home Hardening and Defensible Space

Defensible space, coupled with home hardening, is essential to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. And when everyone does this work, it helps to protect the entire community. In addition, taking these steps may get you an insurance discount or prevent you from being dropped.

Defensible Space Advisory Visit (DSAV). If you haven't already, you owe it to yourself to take advantage of this free program. A trained advisor will visit your property and provide you with advice and a written report on what you can do to help your home survive a wildfire. Two members of the Greenhorn Firewise Community are trained to do this. It's not punitive in any way and the information is shared with no one but you. To schedule a visit, contact Paul Tebbel at (916) 215-6172.

Home Hardening. Flying embers from a wildfire can ignite homes more than a mile away and are responsible for the destruction of most homes during a wildfire. This was the case again in last year's wind-driven Los Angeles fires. Taking the necessary measures to harden your home can increase its likelihood of survival when wildfire strikes. Here are some excellent resources to get you started. Each includes an eye-opening video.

- [Home Hardening](#) (CALFIRE). Includes a self-assessment, visual guide, and comprehensive list of steps you can take for each part of your house.
- [Hardening Your Home](#) (CALFIRE's "Ready for Wildfire" site). Includes a low-cost retrofit list and a comprehensive Wildfire Home Retrofit Guide.

Defensible Space. Your next layer of protection is the area around your home and other structures. California law requires 100 feet of defensible space to the property line around structures to protect residents, first responders, and property. Reduction of fuel in this space can slow or stop the spread of wildfire and protect your home from catching fire. It also provides firefighters a safe area to defend your home. Contrary to what you may have heard, you do not need to remove all trees and vegetation in the area around your home (though the first five feet should be clear of flammable material). Your defensible space is divided into three zones:

- Zone 0 (Immediate Zone) is the first 5 feet around your home and other structures, which should have no (or very low) fuel and any vegetation should be irrigated. Shrubs and trees are not recommended in this zone. Trim back overhanging branches 10 feet from your roof.
- Zone 1 (Intermediate Zone) is 5-30 feet around structures. This area should be free of leaf and needle debris as well as ladder fuels, with vegetation in “islands” (not continuous).
- Zone 2 (Extended Zone) is 30-100 feet out and requires spacing between trees (distance varies based on slope) and removal of ladder fuels (smaller trees and brush that carry fire up into larger trees) and dead trees and shrubs.

Here are some detailed resources to help you understand and meet these requirements:

- [Defensible Space](#) (Ready Nevada County)
- [Defensible Space](#) (CALFIRE’s “Ready for Wildfire” site). This site has more detail.
- [What if your defensible space zone crosses your neighbor’s property line?](#) (Nevada County Coalition of Firewise Communities). Includes information on what to do if your neighbor is not maintaining defensible space.

Roadside Clearance. Minimum clearances are required by Nevada County on private roads and driveways (paved or not) to provide safe egress for you and your neighbors in a fire, as well as for firefighters and other emergency vehicles to access and protect your home and neighborhood. If your road or driveway is a tunnel of fire, they will turn around and go where they can make a difference.

The basic requirements are:

- Shoulder must be cleared of all vegetation on both sides.
- For a minimum of 10 feet on each side of the road or driveway, the tree canopy must be thinned and limbed up to 15 feet of vertical clearance. All branches and dead bushes/trees should be removed; weeds and dead grasses cut to 4” maximum. For maximum risk reduction and to avoid lethal radiant heat in an evacuation, 20-30 feet of thinning and clearance is much better.
- [Roadside clearance fact sheet](#) (with diagrams)

Disposal of Ladder Fuels. All this work adds up to a lot of green waste to deal with (every year). The primary options are chipping, [burning](#) (pile or broadcast), and [disposal](#). We’ll have more detail on this topic in an upcoming newsletter.

Help Us Keep Our Firewise Recognition (and Insurance Discount)

To remain a recognized Firewise Community we need to show an investment of time and money into home hardening and defensible space. Every resident can help by logging the time and money they spend working on their home, property, and shared space such as roadsides. This includes everything from cleaning your gutters and roof, raking, and burning; purchase of a chainsaw or other tools; gas for your chainsaw; dumpster rentals or dump fees and gas expenses for green waste; and more. It’s a bit easier to do this monthly or right after you do the work, rather than waiting until the deadline in November, but you can [log any time](#).

Help Us Reach More Residents! If you have neighbors who are not connected with the Greenhorn Firewise Community, please encourage them to provide us their contact information (<https://www.greenhornfirewise.org/contact-us>).