

[Jurisdiction Name] Defensible Space Code

About this appendix:

Appendix DS adopts the Oregon Department of the State Fire Marshal's Model Defensible Space Code, establishing minimum standards for vegetation management, fuel modification, and defensible space maintenance. The authority having jurisdiction may amend Appendix X to address local conditions, consistent with Oregon Senate Bill 83 (2025). Where Appendix X is not adopted, vegetation clearance in wildland-urban interface areas shall comply with the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code.

Section 101 Definitions

101.1 Scope. Unless otherwise expressly stated, the following words and terms shall, for the purposes of this code, have the meanings shown in this section.

101.2 Referenced Standards Terms not defined here [shall have the meanings ascribed in the Oregon Fire Code, IWUIC (2024 edition), or ORS Chapter 476, as applicable] [shall have their ordinarily accepted meanings, such as the context implies].

102 Definitions.

Code official. The local government entity, such as the planning department, or city, county, or rural fire protection district, whose function includes regulating building use and occupancy or administering fire safety laws, ordinances, and regulations, including the provisions of this code.

Defensible Space. An area, either natural or man-made, where material capable of allowing a fire to spread unchecked has been treated, cleared or modified to slow the rate and intensity of an advancing wildfire and to create an area for fire suppression operations to occur.

Fire-Resistive Vegetation. Plants with the characteristics compiled in Appendix F of this code can be used to reduce the likelihood of fire spread.

Fire-Resistive Vegetation, Non. Flammable plants, including *vegetative fuels*, that ignite readily, can add to the intensity of a wildfire and may increase its spread. Generally, these fuels have fine dry material such as twigs, leaves, and needles, or have high oil and resin content.

Fuel Modification. A method of modifying fuel load by reducing the amount of *nonfire-resistant vegetation* or altering the vegetation type to reduce the fuel load.

Ladder Fuel. Branches, leaves, needles, and other combustible vegetation may spread a wildfire from lower-growing to higher-growing vegetation.

Fuel Break. A natural or constructed barrier designed to slow or stop the progress of a wildfire, including cleared areas, roads, or non-combustible landscaping.

Other human development. Essential facilities, special occupancy structures, or hazardous facilities as defined in ORS 455.447 that support community functions, public communication, energy, or transportation.

Owner. The responsible party owning, leasing, controlling, operating, or maintaining buildings or structures on the property subject to this code and is responsible for modifying or removing *nonfire-resistant vegetation*.

This code. The [jurisdiction name] Defensible Space Code, legally adopted through a local process, shall be known hereafter as “this code”.

Vegetative fuels. Plants that constitute a wildfire hazard.

Wildfire Hazard. A numerical value or local determination considering relevant conditions, describing the likelihood and intensity of a wildfire, based on specific factors or conditions of weather, climate, topography, and vegetation.

Wildland. Forestland, as defined in ORS 477.001, or an unimproved area that contains enough unmanaged vegetation, at any time of the year, to constitute a fire hazard, in the judgment of the forester, regardless of how the area is zoned or taxed.

Wildland fuels. Natural vegetation occurs in areas where development is essentially non-existent, including grasslands, brushlands, rangelands, woodlands, timberlands, or wilderness. Wildland fuels are a type of *vegetative fuel*.

Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Area. A geographical area identified by the adopting local jurisdiction, or local plans, where structures and other human development meets or intermingles with wildland or vegetative fuels.

Section 201

Defensible Space Requirements

201.1 General Requirements. The owner shall establish and maintain a defensible space around all buildings, decks, and other human development in locally designated WUI areas in accordance with this section to reduce wildfire fuel loads and create a buffer zone for potential firefighter use.

201.1.1 5-foot noncombustible space. All buildings, decks, and *other human development* shall include a space of at least 5 feet that is free of all *combustible vegetation*, including grass, weeds, bark dust, *ladder fuel*, and shrubs. Non-combustible materials (e.g., gravel, concrete) or *fire-resistant vegetation* shall be used. No firewood, lumber, or other combustible materials shall be stored in this zone.

201.2 Defensible space distances. Combustible fuels around buildings, decks, and *other human development* shall be modified to create a defensible space perimeter based on hazard levels determined by the *local government*. The levels are:

| Wildland Urban Interface Area | Fuel Modification Distance (feet) ^a |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Moderate Hazard | 30 |
| High Hazard | 50 |
| Extreme Hazard | 100 |

- a. Distances are allowed to be increased due to site-specific analysis based on local conditions and the fire protection plan.

201.3 Fuel Modification. The following modifications shall be established and maintained with the perimeters established in Section 301.2

201.3.1 Trees. Trees are allowed within the defensible space, provided that the horizontal distance between the crowns of adjacent trees and the crowns of trees and structures, overhead electrical facilities, or unmodified fuel is not less than 10 feet (3048 mm).

201.3.2 Groundcover. Deadwood and litter shall be regularly removed from trees. Where ornamental vegetative fuels or cultivated ground cover, such as green grass, ivy, succulents, or similar plants, are used as ground cover, they are allowed to be within the designated defensible space, provided they do not form a means of transmitting fire from the native growth to any structure.

201.4 Best Management Practices. The *code official* is authorized to enforce local best management practices locally relevant to their jurisdiction. Each section must be specifically adopted by reference by the *code official*, based on area conditions, as part of *this code*.

Section 301 Maintenance of Defensible Space

301.1 General Maintenance. The owner shall maintain the requirements in Section 301 and Sections 301.1.1 through 301.1.4 to provide a clear area for fire suppression operations.

301.1.1 Trees. Tree crowns extending to within 10 feet (3048 mm) of any structure shall be pruned to maintain a minimum horizontal clearance of 10 feet (3048 mm). Tree crowns within the *defensible space* shall be pruned to remove limbs located less than 6 feet (1829 mm) above the ground surface adjacent to the trees.

301.1.2 Chimney clearance. Portions of tree crowns that extend to within 10 feet (3048 mm) of a chimney outlet shall be pruned to maintain a minimum horizontal clearance of 10 feet (3048 mm).

301.1.3 Deadwood removal. Deadwood and vegetative litter (*ladder fuel*) shall be regularly removed from trees.

302.1 Inspection and Compliance. The *code official* may conduct periodic inspections to verify compliance with Sections 201 and 301.

303.1 Maintenance Plan. Property owners meeting the local criteria for WUI, as identified by the authority having jurisdiction, should have a plan to maintain the zone in accordance with *this code*.

Appendix F. Characteristics of fire-resistive vegetation.

All plants will burn under extreme fire weather conditions, such as drought. However, plants burn at different intensities and rates of consumption. Fire-resistive plants burn at a relatively low intensity, slow rates of spread and with short flame lengths. The following are characteristics of fire-resistive vegetation:

1. Growth with little or no accumulation of dead vegetation (either on the ground or standing upright).
2. Nonresinous plants (willow, poplar, or tulip trees).
3. Low volume of total vegetation (for example, a grass area as opposed to a forest or shrub-covered land).
4. Plants with high live fuel moisture (plants that contain a large amount of water in comparison to their dry weight).
5. Drought-tolerant plants (deeply rooted plants with thick, heavy leaves).
6. Stands without ladder fuels (plants without small, fine branches and limbs between ground and the canopy of overtopping shrubs and trees).
7. Plants requiring little maintenance (slow-growing plants that, when maintained, require little care).
8. Plants with woody stems and branches that require prolonged heating to ignite.