[Jurisdiction Name] Defensible Space Code

About this model code:
This code, and the provisions contained herein, must be adopted by local governments as required under ORS 476.392.

Section 101
General

101.1 Background. In 2021, the Oregon Legislature enacted Senate Bill 762, establishing comprehensive wildfire initiatives intended to enhance wildfire response and to promote fire-adapted communities by establishing and educating about *defensible space* around homes. In 2023, Senate Bill 80 made legislative changes.

101.2 Authority: In 2025, the Oregon Legislature amended provisions of Senate Bill 762 and 80 through Senate Bill 83 to reflect local flexibility rather than statewide enforcement and directed the State Fire Marshal, pursuant to ORS 476.392, to develop a model *defensible space* code. Adoption of the model code by local governments is voluntary and must occur through each jurisdiction's applicable local or municipal legislative process. Education, enforcement, conflict resolution, and appeals related to an adopted *defensible space* code must be administered by the local jurisdiction.

101.3 Best Practices. Consistent with statute, *this code* incorporates Oregon-specific best practices for *defensible space*, including the non-combustible zone around structures.

101.4 Scope. *This code* applies to buildings, structures, and *other human development* located within areas designated by the local authority as *wildland-urban interface*. The local authority may amend *this code* to address local conditions, where consistent with ORS 476.392.

Section 201
Definitions

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

201.2 Terms not defined. Terms not defined here shall have the meanings ascribed in the Oregon Fire Code, or the International Wildland Urban Interface Code, as applicable. All other terms shall have their ordinarily accepted meanings, as the context implies, according to Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition.

202 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. As defined in ORS 476.392, a natural or human-made area in which material capable of supporting the spread of fire has been treated, cleared or modified to slow the rate and intensity of advancing wildfire and allow space for fire suppression operations to occur.

FIRE-RESISTIVE VEGETATION. Plants contained in the "Fire-resistant Plants for Home Landscapes" (publication PNW 590), or plants with the characteristics compiled in Appendix F of *this code*.

FIRE-RESISTIVE VEGETATION, NON. Plants that do not meet the definition for *fire-resistive vegetation* that ignite readily, add to the intensity of a wildfire, and may increase its spread.

FUEL MODIFICATION. A method of modifying fuel load by reducing the amount of vegetation or altering the vegetation type to reduce the fuel load.

LADDER FUEL. Branches, leaves, needles, and other combustible vegetation that may spread wildfire from lower-growing to higher-growing vegetation.

OTHER HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. Buildings and structures classified as Risk Category IV in accordance with the Oregon Structural Specialty Code, Table 1604.5.

> **User note:** OSSC Table 1604.5 is not part of *this code* but paraphrased for the reader's convenience.
>
> OSSC Table 1604.5 Risk Category IV includes buildings and structures designated as "essential facilities' where the loss of function represents a substantial hazard to occupants or users. It includes hospitals, correctional facilities, fire and police stations, emergency shelters, public utilities, toxic material storage, aircraft control facilities, national defense structures, and water storage and fire suppression facilities.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY. Persons owning, leasing, controlling, operating, or maintaining buildings or structures requiring defensible spaces are responsible for modifying or removing vegetation on the property owned, leased, or controlled by said person.

THIS CODE. The [jurisdiction name] Defensible Space Code, legally adopted through a local process, shall be known hereafter as "*this code*".

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-URBAN INTERFACE. A geographic area, as defined in ORS 477.015, in which there is a concentration of dwellings in an urban or suburban setting near *wildland*.

Section 301
Defensible Space Requirements

301.1 General Requirements. The *responsible party* shall establish and maintain a *defensible space* to reduce wildfire fuel loads and create a buffer zone for potential fire suppression operations around all

buildings, decks, and *other human development* in areas defined *by the code official* as a *wildfire hazard* in the *wildland-urban interface* in accordance with this section.

301.2 5-foot noncombustible defensible space. A noncombustible space not less than 5 feet in width shall be provided around buildings, decks, and *other human development.* The space shall be maintained to reduce the likelihood of fire spread and shall be free of combustible vegetation and accumulations of combustible materials, such as evergreen needles, leaves, firewood, lumber, bark mulch, or other combustible human-created fuels. Noncombustible materials (e.g. gravel, concrete, bare dirt) shall be permitted.

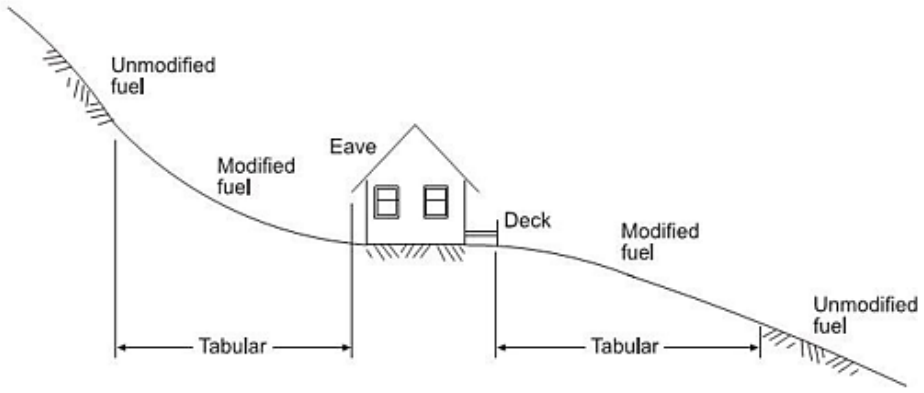
User note: The non-combustible zone shall be measured from the external wall or the farthest point on a deck or attachment.

301.3 Defensible space distances. Combustible fuels around buildings, decks, and *other human development* shall be modified to create a *defensible space* perimeter based on *wildfire 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 Maintenance Plan in Section 401.1. Required distances for fuel modification shall only extend to the applicable property or lot line.

FIGURE 301.3
MEASUREMENTS OF FUEL MODIFICATION DISTANCE



301.4 Fuel Modification. The following *fuel modifications* shall be established and maintained within the perimeters established in Section 301.3.

301.4.1 Trees. Well maintained existing trees are encouraged 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). Deadwood shall regularly be removed from trees.

301.4.1.1 Trees greater than 18 feet tall. Tree crowns extending to within 10 feet (3048 mm) of any structure shall be pruned to maintain a minimum horizontal and vertical 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.

301.4.1.2 Trees 18 feet tall or less. To preserve the health of established trees, no more than 18 (5486 mm) feet tall, lower limbs shall be removed to a height of 1/3 of the tree's total height.

Exception: Newly planted trees or immature trees.

301.4.1.3 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 and vertical clearance of 10 feet (3048 mm).

301.4.2 Groundcover. Deadwood and litter shall be regularly removed. Where ornamental vegetation or cultivated ground cover, such as green grass, succulents, or similar *fire-resistive vegetation*, are used as ground cover, they are allowed to be within the designated *defensible space* outside of the noncombustible zone in 301.2, provided they do not form a means of transmitting fire from the native growth to any structure.

Section 401
Maintenance of Defensible Space

401.1 General Maintenance. The requirements of this section shall be maintained by the *responsible party* to provide a clear area for fire suppression operations.

401.1.1 Trees. Trees and tree crowns in the *defensible space* are to be maintained to the requirements in Sections 301.4.1 through 301.4.1.3.

401.1.2 Deadwood removal. Deadwood and *ladder fuel* shall be regularly removed from trees and vegetation and in accordance with 301.4.1.

402.1 Inspection and Compliance. The *code official* or designee may conduct periodic inspections to verify compliance with Sections 301 and 401.

403.1 Maintenance Plan. Property responsible parties meeting the local criteria for *wildland-urban interface*, as identified by the authority having jurisdiction, should have an articulable plan to maintain the zone in accordance with *this code*.

Referenced Standards

About this section:
There are many sources of information about wildland-urban interface fires. Included in this section are those codes and standards referenced in this code.

ICC International Code Council

IWUIC – 24: International Wildland Urban Interface Code®
603.1, 603.2, 603.2.1, 603.2.2, 603.2.3, 604.1, 604.2, 604.3, 604.4, 604.4.1, 604.4.2, Appendix F-1

OSSC Oregon Structural Specialty Code

OSSC – 25: Oregon Structural Specialty Code
Table 1604.5 – Risk Category IV

Appendix F: Characteristics and Planting Principles of Fire-Resistive Vegetation

About this appendix:
This appendix provides general guidelines when evaluating the fire-resistant characteristics of various vegetative species.

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 relatively low intensity, with slow rates of spread and short flame lengths, due to their characteristics. The following are characteristics and planting principles of fire-resistive vegetation:

1. Characteristics:
    a. Plants with growth with little or no accumulation of dead vegetation (either on the ground or standing upright).
    b. Plants with low levels of resins, oils, and waxes (Nonresinous) plants, such as willow, poplar, or tulip trees.
    c. Plants with high live fuel moisture (plants that contain a large amount of water in comparison to their dry weight).
    d. Plants with woody stems and branches that can withstand prolonged heating before ignition.
    e. Plants that are deeply rooted with an open growing pattern.
2. Planting or maintenance principles:
    a. Tree stands without *ladder fuels* (plants without small, fine branches and limbs between ground and the canopy of overtopping shrubs and trees).
    b. Plants requiring little maintenance (slow-growing plants that, when maintained, require little care).
    c. Irrigation is properly and consistently maintained.
    d. Low volume of total vegetation by creating separation between *fire-resistive plants*.
    e. Trees are regularly trimmed, limbed, irrigated, or maintained for disease. Any trees should appear healthy with no signs of disease or dead tops.

Bibliography

The following resource material was used as a background reference for Oregon landscapes:
Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes (PNW 590) - https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pnw-590-fire-resistant-plants-home-landscapes
Pacific Northwest Extension, October 2023.