

Fire Defense for Grass Valley residents

The Washington Hill Fire Coalition (gvFireAdapted.org) wrote this unofficial summary of city regulations because the official codes were hard for us to understand. Get the official Grass Valley Municipal Code 8.16 from city hall or online: bit.ly/2MJ57Tn

Fire preparedness deadline: June 1 (Or as declared by Cal Fire)

Road clearance for emergency vehicles (Required)

- Trim or clear vegetation 3 feet from edge of pavement
 - Ground cover is ok if not a “fire hazard”
 - This also gives room for evacuation, even if roadsides are burning
- Roadways need 13’ 6” vertical clearance for fire truck access. This extends into the 3’ shoulder.
- The city can clear roadways that impede access without notice & charge costs to property owner
- Applies to all roads & properties (public, private, improved, or unimproved)

Property defensible space (Required)

- Limb trees to 6 feet if height of tree allows
- Cut trees back 10 feet from chimneys, stovepipe, & electrical power service drops
- Cut dead wood out of trees & shrubs that are near homes, sheds, decks, and any structure
- Avoid dense patches of shrubs, saplings or blackberry thickets
 - Thin by limbing up and maintaining gaps between plants or by removing plants.
 - Extra important for flammable species like manzanita, juniper, cedar, blackberry, ...
 - Blackberry patches are not allowed unless actively maintained for fruit
- Avoid ladder fuels that give fire a path to climb from the ground into tree canopies.
 - Examples: Cedar branches touching the ground. Bushes, shrubs or saplings touching lower limbs of taller trees. Vines climbing into trees.
 - Either maintain vertical air gaps between bushes and tree limbs or remove bushes.
- Avoid other “fire hazards” as specified in the city code. Talk to Fire Department for interpretation.
- During Fire Season...
 - Clear roof of pine needles, leaves, branches & flammable materials
 - Mow “weeds” and grass to 4” or less
- Lot smaller than 1 acre? Maintain entire lot.
- Lot larger than 1 acre? Maintain at least a 30’ border around your property line and structures. Maintaining entire property is recommended.
- Applies to all properties: improved and unimproved.
- City can give owner notice, remove fire hazards, charge owner, and/or put a lien on the property.

City Enforcement

If our properties do not meet this code, then the fire marshall can serve the owner and/or resident 30-days notice to meet the fire code requirements. If these requirements are not met, the city can complete the work and charge the property owner. You can anonymously report properties that do not meet these standards by filing this form and check box for “Overgrown and/or piles of vegetation”:

<http://www.cityofgrassvalley.com/document-central/code-compliance-investigation-request>

Recommendations

These recommendations aren't required by law, but can greatly reduce your fire risk.

Create strong defensible space

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/By-topic/Wildfire/Preparing-homes-for-wildfire>

- Focus your energy in a bulls-eye shape around your house.
 - 5' fuel-free zone
 - 30' lean, clean, and green
 - 100' fuel reduction
- Don't allow continuous fuels in your yard or leading up to your house that can act like a wick. (plants/mulch/wood fences/etc).
- Maintain air gaps for "fire breaks" between plants: horizontally & vertically.
- Remove ladder fuels that provide fire a path from ground level into tree canopies
 - Examples: Low hanging limbs, vines going up trees, brush like juniper or manzanita that grows close to tree limbs.
- All plants are flammable, but some are less flammable than others, especially if they are watered, branches within a foot or two of the ground are pruned, and dead materials is regularly removed.
- Avoid fire-prone plants near your house, including but not limited to junipers.
- Check your roof & gutters when establishing the 5' fuel-free zone.

Make your structures fire resistant to embers and flame front

Many homes catch fire from wildfire embers, especially when the fire is driven by wind. An ember storm is like a fierce blizzard, but with burning embers blowing into every nook & cranny: attic, crawl space, trash cans, leaf litter in gutters or on decks. It's bad news if embers land on fine fuels that are next to larger fuels. Watch videos at: disastersafety.org/wildfire/wildfire-videos

- Choose fire resistant designs and materials, and properly maintain them.
- Don't let combustible materials pile up on your house or under your deck.
- Keep cardboard boxes and other flammable materials out of your attic, crawl space, etc
- Install ember-resistant vents such as [BrandGuard](#), or put a 1/8" aluminum screen over your attic & basement vents to prevent large embers from getting in.
1/16" screen blocks more embers, but needs annual inspection for clogging.
- Plug any loose shingles, siding, or other cracks that could let embers blow into your attic, framing, or crawl space.
- Non-flammable gutter guards that block pine needles are great.

Talk to your neighbors about making their properties fire resistant

Most of our houses are close enough together that if one house catches fire, it can spread across the neighborhood like dominoes falling. Even if my house was 100% fire-resistant, a neighbor's house burning from less than 30' away could eventually catch my house on fire. Like it or not, we're in this together.

Not recommended

Don't use outdoor sprinklers as a primary defense; they are better as a fourth line of defense. In a wind-driven fire, water won't always land where you want, and it can't protect from embers blowing into attics or crawl spaces. People often jump to the idea of outdoor sprinklers, but it won't help that much unless you've already made your home resistant to ember storms and flame fronts, established defensible space, and keep piles of pine needles and flammable stuff away from your home & roof. Also, if everyone used big sprinklers, the fire department wouldn't have enough water pressure to do their job.

Resources

Background materials for self-assessment and action

- Wildfire Home Assessment and Checklist (11 page) bit.ly/2K9jamM
- How to prepare your home for wildfires (1 page fact sheet) bit.ly/2t1zU4I
- Protecting from Ember Ignition in attics & crawl spaces (1 page fact sheet) bit.ly/2Rt4uhr
- CalFire preparedness website www.readyforwildfire.org
- Nevada County Fire Season Guide 2019-2020 bit.ly/2xQGdum

Nevada County Fire Safe Council

- Low-cost chipping
- Low-cost reflective address signs
- Free on-site Defensible Space Advisory visits
- Advice & Information
- Contact information
 - 143 B Spring Hill Drive, Suite 13, Grass Valley, CA
 - (530) 272-1122
 - areyoufiresafe.com
 - Email: info@areyoufiresafe.com

The **Natural Resources Conservation Services** can cost-share on vegetation management for larger property owners inside or outside of the city through their Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) bit.ly/2WzpXJk

For questions about code & enforcement, talk to your local fire department, fireadmin@cityofgrassvalley.com

For questions about best-practices, talk to your local fire scientist, [Dr Kate Wilkin](mailto:Dr.Kate.Wilkin@cityofgrassvalley.com) [<wilkinkate@gmail.com>](mailto:wilkinkate@gmail.com). Identify yourself as a Washington Hill neighbor to get a priority response.

For the latest version of this document, go to: bit.ly/2Wv0Gjv