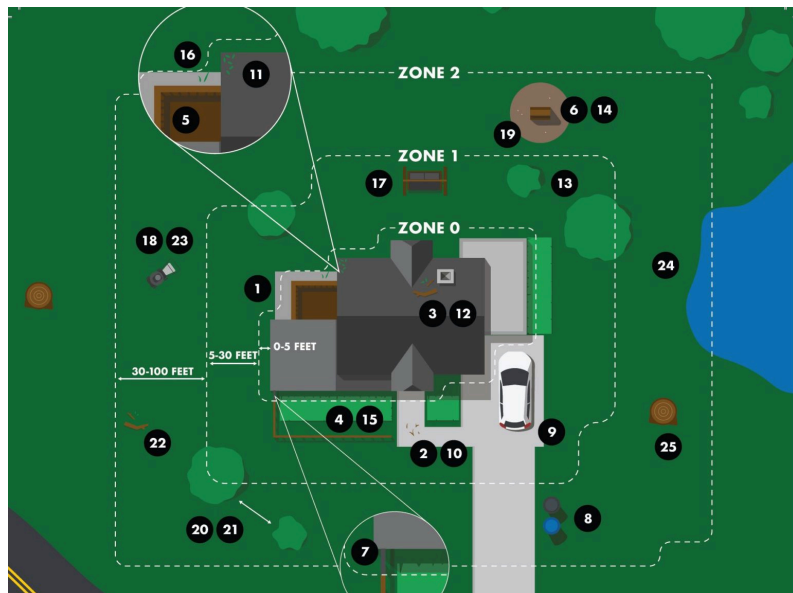




Safer West County Defensible Space Rebate Project Information & Terms of Participation

Defensible space is essential to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. Defensible space is the buffer you create between your home and flammable vegetation and other flammable items surrounding it. By creating a fire resistant area around your home, you can help protect your home from catching fire. It also gives firefighters a safe, nonflammable area to work in to defend your home.

Safer West County (a 501(c)(3)), in conjunction with Fire Safe Sonoma, has received a Hazardous Fuels Reduction Grant from CAL FIRE to reduce fire fuels in four Western Sonoma County communities. **This project will provide 400 primarily low-income households across Occidental, Camp Meeker, Monte Rio, and Forestville with rebates for defensible space work around their homes and structures.**



Rebates cover two-thirds of the total project costs up to \$1,000. We recognize that these limited funds will only go so far. We recommend that participants use the rebate to treat the most

critical area for fire protection on their property, which is “Zone 0,” the 5-foot space immediately around the footprint of your home. Learn more about the Defensible Space Zones from CAL FIRE: <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/>

We encourage early applications to this first-come, first-served opportunity! The project will end when funding is depleted. Rebate amounts are subject to change at the discretion of the grant administrators.

How do I participate?

1. **Apply.** Apply through [the web application](#). Use your home defensible space assessment to determine what work needs to be done. You set the budget and scope of work that fits for you. You’ll also need these required documents: Before-work photos and a recent (no more than one year old) defensible space assessment or inspection.
2. **Get approved.** You’ll be notified if your application is approved. Application review can take 30 days upon receipt of all required documents. If you’re approved, you will be notified that you may proceed with hiring a contractor to make the defensible space improvements described in your application.
3. **Hire your contractor.** Hire any contractor you like. Note that CAL FIRE will not reimburse sweat-equity (do-it-yourself labor) from applicants on this project. For your convenience, we have assembled a list of local contractors ([click here to see the list](#)). Note that Safer West County and Fire Safe Sonoma make no representation about the quality of work performed by these listed contractors; using the contractors on this list is not required.
4. **Get the work done.** From the time you are approved, you have 6 months to hire your contractor, complete the improvements, and request your rebate.
5. **Request your rebate.** After work is completed, [submit your rebate request](#) with after-work photos, the contractor’s invoice, and your W-9 Tax Form. Fire Safe Sonoma will return your invoice with the rebate award noted. Remember, the rebate covers two-thirds of the total project costs, up to \$1,000. Refer to the Payment Scenarios below for more information. Alternatively, if you and your contractor agree, you can request the rebate payment be sent directly to your contractor.
6. **Receive your rebate.** Fire Safe Sonoma will process rebates. You should receive a check in the mail from Fire Safe Sonoma within 30 days of receipt of the required documents. Alternatively, if you and your contractor agree, the contractor will receive a check in the mail from Fire Safe Sonoma within 30 days of receipt of the required documents.

Eligibility

Requirement

1. The only eligibility requirement is that your property must be within the project area. [View the Project Area map](#) here.

Preferences

1. Low income households: Priority will be given to low-income applicants (see Low-Income Chart below).
2. Neighboring properties: We encourage applicants to work with their neighbors. Our preference is for several connecting or neighboring properties applying in the same year. Our goal is to help not just individual residents but entire neighborhoods to become more fire safe. Also, it's possible that if multiple neighbors use the same contractor during the same time period, costs may be lowered.

Low-Income Chart for residents of the Project Area Source: CA Dept. of Housing and Community Development
1 person in household with an income of \$70,500 or less
2 people in household with combined income of \$80,550 or less
3 people in household with combined income of \$90,600 or less
4 people in household with combined income of \$100,650 or less
5 people in household with combined income of \$108,750 or less
6 people in household with combined income of \$116,800 or less
7 people in household with combined income of \$124,850 or less
8 people in household with combined income of \$132,900 or less

Required Documents

With your application, please provide:

- A recent professionally completed **home defensible space assessment or inspection** (also called a Notice of Defensible Space Inspection). [See an example here](#). If you don't have a recent assessment (no more than one year old) and need help getting one, you can request help in the application.

- **Pre-work photos** that show the need for defensible space improvements. For example, a tree branch leaning over a chimney, or foliage immediately against the house siding. The photos should match the information in the recent assessment.

At the time that you request your rebate, please provide:

- **IRS Form W-9** (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification): Rebate dollars may be considered taxable. Participants must submit a [Form W-9](#) in order to receive their rebate. Because this document contains sensitive information, please do not submit this form through the web application. Follow the instructions for secure sending in the [Rebate Request Form](#).
- **After-work photos to match the pre-work photos:** Photos that show the defensible space improvements. The photos should match the area photographed in the pre-work photos. [See an example of before-and-after photos here.](#)
- **Eligible Contractor invoice(s):** Only invoices provided by a contractor (an entity such as a landscaper or tree crew) are eligible for the rebate. Eligible invoices must include the entity's business name and billing information, the date and description of work, the total project cost, the payment due date, and the project grant number: 5GA21140. [An invoice template is provided here for convenience.](#)

Important Reminders

Application Review: Application review can take 30 days upon receipt of all required documents. Approval is based on a first-come and priority ranking basis (low-income and neighboring properties will be prioritized).

Completing work: Once approved, applicants have a 6-month grace period to hire their contractor, complete their defensible space work, and request their rebate. If you are unable to hire your contractor within the grace period, notify us and request an extension.

Rebate requests can take 30 days to process.

End of the Project: The project will end January 31, 2026. Payments will be distributed until January 31, 2026, or until funds are no longer available, whichever condition occurs first. Because rebates take up to a month to process, no new rebate requests will be accepted after December 31, 2025.

Rebate Payment Scenarios

The following scenarios are provided to help illustrate how the rebate limits work.

Example Payment Scenarios		
Total Project Cost (as determined by Landowner and Contractor)	Landowner pays Contractor one-third of project cost or more (no maximum)	Fire Safe Sonoma pays Contractor two-thirds of the project cost up to \$1,000 (maximum)
\$300	\$100	\$200
\$1,000	\$333	\$667
\$1,200	\$400	\$800
\$1,500	\$500	\$1,000
\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000 (maximum)
\$3,000	\$2,000	\$1,000 (maximum)

More Example Scenarios

Scenario A

After qualifying, Applicant A hired their contractor to do work identified in a defensible space inspection they received from CAL FIRE. The contractor charged \$1,500 for the work. Applicant A paid their contractor and then requested their rebate. As a rule, Fire Safe Sonoma rebates two-thirds of the project cost up to \$1,000. Two-thirds of \$1,500 is \$1,000. This amount also happens to be the maximum rebate allowed per household. Fire Safe Sonoma rebated Applicant A \$1,000.

Scenario B

After qualifying, Applicant B hired their contractor to do work identified in a defensible space inspection they received from CAL FIRE. The contractor charged \$2,000 for the work. Applicant B paid their contractor and then requested their rebate. As a rule, Fire Safe Sonoma rebates two-thirds of the project cost up to \$1,000. Two-thirds of \$2,000 is \$1,333, however this is more than the maximum rebate amount. Fire Safe Sonoma rebated Applicant B, the maximum amount, \$1,000.

Scenario C

After qualifying, Applicant C hired a contractor to do work identified in their defensible space assessment they received from a Safer West County trained volunteer assessor. The contractor charged \$1,000 for the work. Applicant C paid their contractor and then requested their rebate. Fire Safe Sonoma rebated them two-thirds of the project cost, which was \$667.

Scenario C - Part 2

Knowing that the maximum rebate is up to \$1,000 per household, Applicant C decided to apply a second time to max out the \$1,000 rebate, by hiring a second contractor who charged \$800

for the second job. Fire Safe Sonoma rebated Applicant C only \$333 for the second job, because $\$667 + \$333 = \$1,000$ (the maximum).

Scenario D

After qualifying, Applicant D delayed hiring a contractor for five months. Applicant D received a warning that they have one month left of their 6-month grace period to get the work done and request their rebate for work completed, and that grant funds are dwindling. After seven months, Applicant D hired their contractor. The contractor charged \$1,500 for the work. By the time Applicant D submitted their rebate request to Fire Safe Sonoma, the grace period had passed and grant funds had been depleted. Applicant D did not receive a rebate. This unfortunate outcome could have been avoided if the applicant completed their work within the 6-month grace period.

Ready to Apply?

Applicants can apply using [this web application](#) to submit all required documents. If you need assistance applying, please contact us at Rebates@SaferWestCounty.org. We encourage you to apply soon to this first-come, first-served opportunity!



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is defensible space? How do I make it around my home and structures?

Defensible space is essential to improve your home's chance of surviving a wildfire. Defensible space is the buffer you create between your home and flammable vegetation and other flammable items surrounding it. By creating a fire resistant area around your home, you can help protect your home from catching fire. It also gives firefighters a safe, nonflammable area to work in to defend your home.

Participating homeowners will work to accomplish a three-tiered setback around buildings that totals 100 feet and meets the guidelines set forth in California Public Resources Code Section §4291:

Zone 0 – Ember-Resistant Zone

Zone 0 extends 5 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc.

The ember-resistant zone is currently not required by law, but science has proven it to be the most important of all the defensible space zones. This zone includes the area under and around all attached decks, and requires the most stringent wildfire fuel reduction. The ember-resistant zone is designed to keep fire or embers from igniting materials that can spread the fire to your home. The

following provides guidance for this zone, which may change based on the regulation developed by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection.

- Use hardscape like gravel, pavers, concrete and other noncombustible mulch materials. No combustible bark or mulch
- Remove all dead and dying weeds, grass, plants, shrubs, trees, branches and vegetative debris (leaves, needles, cones, bark, etc.); Check your roofs, gutters, decks, porches, stairways, etc.
- Remove all branches within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe outlet
- Limit combustible items (outdoor furniture, planters, etc.) on top of decks
- Relocate firewood and lumber to Zone 2
- Replace combustible fencing, gates, and arbors attach to the home with noncombustible alternatives
- Consider relocating garbage and recycling containers outside this zone
- Consider relocating boats, RVs, vehicles and other combustible items outside this zone

Zone 1 – Lean, Clean and Green Zone

Zone 1 extends 30 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Remove all dead plants, grass and weeds (vegetation).
- Remove dead or dry leaves and pine needles from your yard, roof and rain gutters.
- Remove branches that hang over your roof and keep dead branches 10 feet away from your chimney.
- Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees.
- Relocate wood piles to Zone 2.
- Remove or prune flammable plants and shrubs near windows.
- Remove vegetation and items that could catch fire from around and under decks, balconies and stairs.
- Create a separation between trees, shrubs and items that could catch fire, such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets, etc.

Zone 2 – Reduce Fuel Zone

Zone 2 extends from 30 feet to 100 feet out from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to your property line, whichever is closer.

- Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of 4 inches.
- Create horizontal space between shrubs and trees. (See diagram)
- Create vertical space between grass, shrubs and trees. (See diagram)
- Remove fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches. However, they may be permitted to a depth of 3 inches.
- All exposed wood piles must have a minimum of 10 feet of clearance, down to bare mineral soil, in all directions.

Zone 1 and 2 - Outbuildings

“Outbuildings” and Liquid Propane Gas (LPG) storage tanks shall have 10 feet of clearance to bare mineral soil and no flammable vegetation for an additional 10 feet around their exterior.

Learn more about the defensible space zones:

- CAL FIRE’s [Ready for Wildfire website](#)
- UCCE’s [Wildfire Preparation Guide](#)
- [Resilient Landscapes Coalition](#) (Sonoma County)
- [Sustainable Defensible Space & Resilient Landscapes](#) article
- [Zone Zero](#) video by UCCE
- [Sustainable Defensible Space](#) video by UCCE
- [Fire Safe Sonoma](#) Maintain the Landscape around your home!

2. Are landowners required to maintain defensible space by law?

Yes. In the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County, landowners are required to comply with California Public Resources Code Section §4291. [Learn more about defensible space law and see CAL FIRE’s defensible space guidelines here.](#)

3. What if I already did the work? Can I be reimbursed for past work?

It’s possible. If you have a defensible space inspection that is no more than one year old and a contractor’s invoice dated after the defensible space inspection, you may be considered for reimbursement.

4. Can I do my own work and get paid for it?

Unfortunately, no. This grant does not pay for do-it-yourself, sweat-equity labor. Applicants can only receive rebates for invoices from qualified contractors.

5. What if I don’t have a recently completed (no older than one year) professional home defensible space assessment or a Notice of Defensible Space Inspection from CAL FIRE or my local fire department?

If you don’t have a recent inspection, you can request one in the application, and we will connect you to a provider.

6. Can I apply with a paper application rather than online?

Yes, please call us if you need this service at (707) 823-5244 ex 13 or email us at Rebates@SaferWestCounty.org.

7. What if I want to purchase materials (gravel, weedcloth, etc.)?

While receipts for materials purchased by the landowner can’t be reimbursed, invoices from your contractor that include materials are eligible for the rebate.

8. What if I can’t hire my contractor within the 6-month grace period?

If you are unable to hire your contractor within the 6-month grace period, you can request an extension with a reasonable explanation for the delay.

9. Does this project encourage neighbors to work together on defensible space projects?

Yes. Our preference is for several connecting or neighboring properties applying in the same year. Our goal is to help not just individual residents but entire neighborhoods to become more fire safe. Also, it's possible that if multiple neighbors use the same contractor during the same time period, costs may be lowered.

10. Is other assistance available for residents to create defensible space?

Yes, other assistance is available in many forms:

- Hand tools are available to rent at no cost through [Fire Safe Sonoma's Tool Trailer](#). Tools include chainsaws, loppers, uprooters, pruners, limbing and pole saws, gloves, tarps, rakes, wheelbarrow, and shovels.
- Residents within the grant area can apply for free chipping services from their local fire department, thanks to the same CAL FIRE grant that funds this rebate project. Learn more about this opportunity on the [Safer West County Grants webpage](#).
- More resources are available through [Fire Safe Sonoma](#).

About Safer West County

Safer West County (SWC) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit focused on the collaboration of different western Sonoma County communities. We focus on reducing risk from disasters and improving emergency preparedness for all the communities in the connected watersheds and “firesheds” from the Russian River south, west of Sebastopol, north of Bodega Highway, and east of the coast. We are a collaboration of Fire Safe Councils, individuals, and businesses that make up West County.

About Fire Safe Sonoma

Fire Safe Sonoma is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit and is the countywide Fire Safe Council for Sonoma County. Fire Safe Sonoma has been educating residents about wildfire prevention and safety for over 25 years, taking on large-scale fuel's reduction projects, and aiding local community groups with wildland fire risk reduction. For more information visit our website: www.firesafesonoma.org

About the funding source

This project is funded by a grant from CAL FIRE's Fire Prevention Grant Program. This project is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment — particularly in disadvantaged communities.

