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Introduction

By following these guidelines, our chipper program will run smoothly and our equipment will remain in better condition to chip more of our community's debris. Thank you for your cooperation.

Safer West County, Fire Safe Sonoma and local fire departments are providing free chipper service to residents who are engaged in making their property more wildfire safe. The purpose

of the project is to create defensible space, specifically around the home, structures, and access routes to the structures.

In the event of a wildfire, having 100 feet or more of defensible space has been clearly demonstrated to help save homes. Likewise, thinning vegetation on access roads can make it safer for residents and firefighters. We hope that our free chipper service will help residents dispose of woody debris and assist in creating beautiful, healthy, and "firewise" landscapes around homes and on roadsides.

This grant-funded project supports residents in Camp Meeker, Forestville, Occidental and Monte Rio.

Applicant Eligibility Criteria

An applicant is **eligible** if:

- They are a resident, landowner or land manager of **property within Camp Meeker, Forestville, Occidental or Monte Rio**. The property may be either improved (with a home or structure) or unimproved (without a home or structure). **Use our interactive map of the [Safer West County Chipper Project Service Area](#) to see if your location is within the service area.**

An applicant is **ineligible** if:

- They are a resident, landowner or land manager of **property outside of Camp Meeker, Forestville, Occidental or Monte Rio**. If an applicant is not eligible for chipping service through our project, they may be eligible through the [County of Sonoma Curbside Chipper Program](#).

Application Guidelines

Applicants should apply for chipping using the [Free Safer West County Chipper Service Project Application](#). [Contact us](#) if you require assistance.

Applicants must follow the guidelines in order to participate. See details below.

Application Deadline: The project launched in March 2023 and will run for roughly three years, ending March 31, 2026. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis through the end of the project.

Guidelines for Chipper Piles

Please stack your piles BEFORE filling out an application.

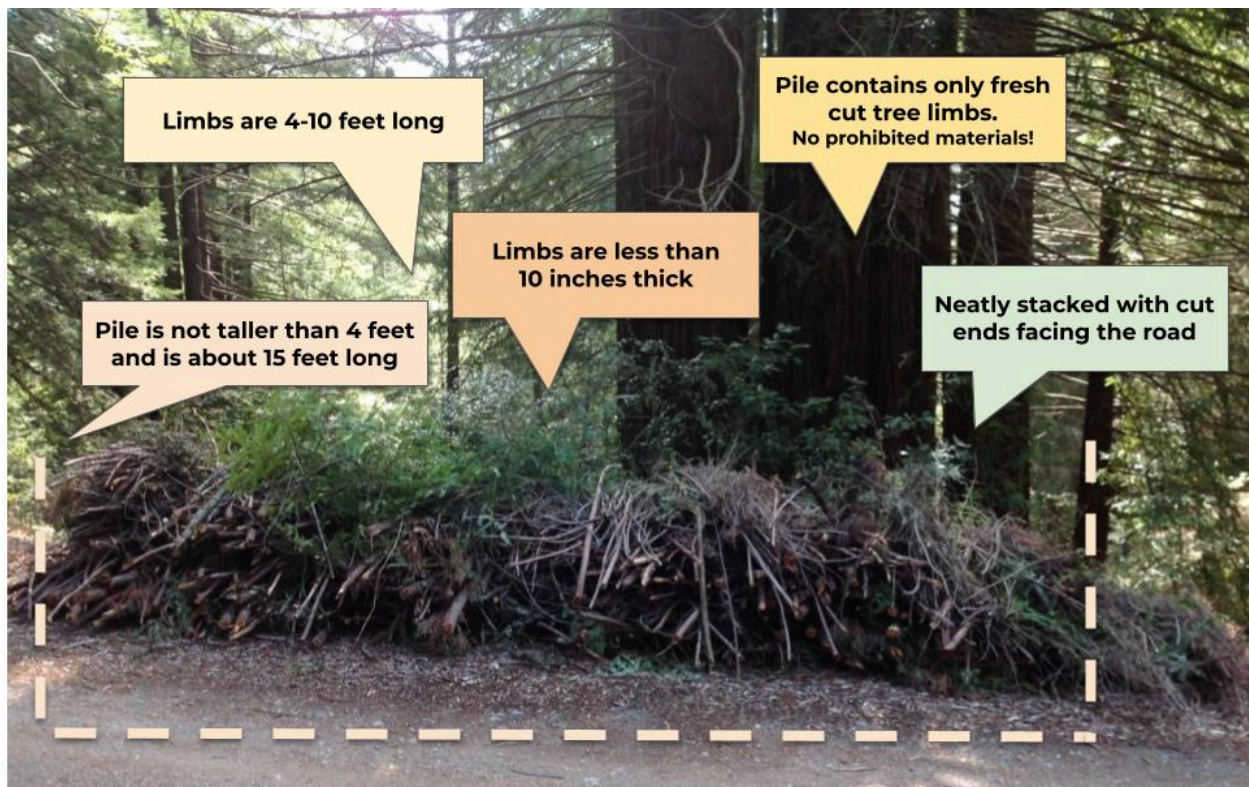
Piles must be stacked and placed according to the guidelines. Please read the guidelines below before creating your chipper pile. When your piles are complete, take digital photos of your pile(s) to submit along with your application.

Example chipper piles



1. How do I make a chipper pile?

- Piles must be no more than 4-feet tall, 10-feet wide, and with rows no longer than 50-feet.
- Limbs should be between 4-feet long and 10-feet long. The chipper can chip wood up to 10-feet long and 10-inches thick (diameter). It is quicker for the crew to chip one 10-foot branch than multiple short lengths.
- Piles must be stacked with the cut ends facing the same direction, pointing towards the access route, preferably on the uphill side.
- Do not use large equipment, such as tractors or bobcats, to stack piles.



2. What IS allowed in the chipper pile?

The chipper project is intended for trees and brush cut to create or maintain defensible space. The chipper can handle trees or brush up to 4-inches in diameter and up to 10-feet long. Freshly cut and stacked materials chip much better than old, dry wood. If your piles have been in place for a long time and/or contain a lot of old, dry material, our crews may not be able to chip them.

3. What is NOT allowed in the chipper pile?

Chipper piles may NOT contain the following, and participants will be responsible for disposing of any unchipped materials:

- No tree or shrub logs thicker than 10 inches (diameter)
- No tree or shrub logs longer than 10 feet
- No nails, wires, or any metal pieces!
- No roots or stumps
- No Poison Oak or other poisonous species
- No vines or materials entangled with vines
- No Oleander (poisonous plant)
- No bamboo or fibrous materials such as palm tree fronds
- No plants with thorns including roses and blackberries
- No Scotch/French broom or gorse
- No construction-type wood (Example: fence posts or 2x4s)

- No rocks, dirt, and/or mud
- No rakings or piles of needles, leaves, and/or grass
- No fire debris, burned logs, branches, or trees from past fires
- No firewood or logs cut into wood rounds
- No wood older than one year
- No failed burn piles or burned wood
- No plants known to be infected by Sudden Oak Death

4. How many piles can I request free chipping service for?

There is no limit to the number of piles an applicant can request chipping services for. Note that splitting material into multiple piles is required for large volumes of material, as pile size restrictions apply. See “How do I make a chipper pile?”

5. Where should I place my pile so that the crew can easily get to it?

Piles must be placed along road or driveway frontages so that crews can work safely without the need for additional personnel, signage, or road closure permits. The crew will not chip piles that are more than 10-feet from an accessible road or driveway. Special accommodations may be provided upon request. Please indicate in your application if they are needed. The chipper cannot go up very steep slopes.

Please follow these general guidelines:

- Do not put piles where they might block roadways or access
- Do not put piles within 10-feet of power poles
- Do not put piles at a deadend where the chipper can't turn around. The chipper and truck must be able to get to a place they can turn around
- Place piles within 10-feet of chipper access, preferably on the uphill side of the road or driveway. Crews should not have to drive off the driveway or work around obstructions
- If our chipper can't access your piles, we can't chip them
- Special accommodations will be made for Camp Meeker. If you would like chipping done at a property in Camp Meeker and you need help finding an accessible place to stack your chip pile, please let us know in your application
- Disposal of any unchipped material is the responsibility of the property owner

Emergency Parking

Chipping is conducted by local firefighters. Firefighters may need to leave the site if called away to respond to an emergency. Indicate in your application if you allow firefighters to park and leave the chipper until they can return.

6. How are chip piles placed?

Vegetation goes into one end of the chipper and comes out the other side. Chips are blown one chipper length away from the vegetation debris pile. The crew will use their judgment to blow chips in a place that is practical and safe. The applicant is responsible for spreading out the piles of chips.

If the applicant wishes the chips be blown in a specific way, they can indicate that in the application. The crew will do their best to meet the request.

For applicants who do not have space on their property for the chips, or for whom the chips would pose a fire threat, they may want to arrange for chips to be blown into a truck bed and hauled off-site. The crew is not responsible for providing trucks for this purpose. There are exceptions for Camp Meeker residents.



7. What is a fire-safe way to use the chips on my property?

Once the vegetation has been chipped, you may want to use those chips on your landscaping. Here are some suggestions about fire-safe ways to use the chips on your property. Chips are flammable and can carry fire to your home if placed improperly. Chips pose less of a fire risk if placed 30 feet away from structures, spread thinly (less than 1 inch deep) on the ground, and placed in patches or islands separated by nonflammable surfaces.

- [Learn about reducing fire hazard around your home here.](#)
- [Learn about the fire hazards of garden mulch here.](#)

8. The fine print on liability

- a. To participate in the project, the participant must attest that they are the legal property owner, and they grant permission to Safer West County and Fire Safe Sonoma Inc., its contractors and its necessary project partners, to enter the roadside frontage of the property during chipper service for the sole purpose of roadside brush chipping for fire safety.
- b. To participate in the project, the participant must agree to hold the organization listed above, its contractors, staff, volunteers, board members and necessary project partners, harmless from and forever discharge them from any and all liability for damages, injury, or loss which may be sustained as a result of their entry into the private property for work performed on the property as described in this agreement.
- c. To participate in the project, the participant must agree to hold harmless the organization listed above and forever discharge the applicant from any and all liability for any damage, injury, or loss which may be sustained as a result of entry into the private property described in this agreement.

Conditions for Denied Services

Chipper services may be denied if:

- Applicant's location falls outside of Camp Meeker, Forestville, Occidental or Monte Rio
- Application is not submitted properly
- Pile is deemed to be inaccessible to the crew
- Pile contains prohibited materials
- Pile is not stacked according to the guidelines
- Pile is not ready by the time of service
- Applicant does not comply with the Full Terms of Participation
- Other reasons may apply

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What will participating in this project cost me?

Nothing! This project provides FREE chipping services.

2. Do I need to have my pile ready at the time that I apply for free chipping services?

Yes. We request applicants submit photos of their prepared piles in their applications, showing that they have followed the guidelines.

3. When will I know if my application is approved?

The applicant will receive a communication approving or denying their application within 7-14 business days of submission.

4. How soon after applying will my pile be chipped?

The pile will be chipped at the fire department's convenience, usually within a few days, but it could be a month or more.

5. Do I need to be home when the chipper comes?

The applicant does not need to be home at the time of the scheduled chipper service.

If the applicant wishes to be present at the time of the chipper service, they may indicate so on the application. While we can't guarantee it, we will do our best to coordinate such that the applicant is present at the time of servicing.

6. What is the purpose of this project?

This project is designed to support residents of low-income households in Camp Meeker, Forestville, Occidental and Monte Rio who are engaged in creating wildfire defensible space by removing hazardous vegetation specifically around their homes, structures, and access routes. Residents can pile the removed vegetation and request free chipper service to turn vegetative debris into chips. Residents do not need to be low-income to receive chipping services.

7. Who operates this project?

This project is operated by Safer West County, Fire Safe Sonoma and the four local fire departments: Occidental Community Services District, Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (serving Camp Meeker), Monte Rio Fire Protection District, and Sonoma County Fire District (serving Forestville), as well as Sonoma County Fire Prevention Division.

8. How is this project funded?

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.



9. What is a defensible space project?

Defensible space is the buffer you create between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surround it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire and it helps protect your home from catching fire—either from embers, direct flame contact or radiant heat. Proper defensible space also provides firefighters a safe area to work in, to defend your home.

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

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

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

Yes. Neighbors are encouraged to work together to create defensible space in their neighborhood. Many hands make light work, and working together can be inspiring and rewarding. In addition, many residents who are elderly or have mobility limitations may appreciate the assistance of their neighbors or loved ones.

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

Yes. You can request an assessment of your home's vulnerabilities to wildfire. Safer West County can help connect you to an assessor.

For a limited time, eligible applicants can request free home assessment and improvements made in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. [Learn more here.](#)

Hand tools are available upon request for residents in west county. Tools include loppers, uprooters, pruners, limbing and pole saws, gloves, tarps, rakes, wheelbarrow, and shovels.

In the near future, incentive dollars will be available for residents within the grant area to hire contractors for defensible space projects. If you are interested in accessing funds, please send an email to Incentives@saferwestcounty.org. Safer West County will be sharing more information about this project on the [Grants page](#) when it launches.

Many more resources about defensible space are available through [Fire Safe Sonoma](#).

13. How can I avoid harming native birds when removing vegetation?

Native birds are protected from harm under federal and state law. Adult birds can usually escape harm during vegetation clearing activities by flying away, but during the nesting season (January 1st to September 15th), eggs and chicks are endangered by clearing activity. You can avoid harming them by limiting vegetation clearing activities during the nesting season. If clearing is unavoidable during this time, you can still avoid harm by assessing a tree/shrub for active nests, and avoiding trees/shrubs that have active nests. Do this by watching for nests, adult birds flying to and from a nest, or adult birds sitting on a nest, as it can be assumed that the nest is active. Note that some birds will nest in your chipper piles. Before chipping, check that your pile does not have a bird's nest within or under it.

14. Who do I contact if I need more information or assistance with the application?

If you have any questions about the project or application, you can contact us by emailing Chippers@saferwestcounty.org.

15. How is this project different from the Free Curbside Chipper Program run by the County of Sonoma?

- a. The funding source is different: The County's program is funded by the County's General Fund. This project is funded by a grant from CAL FIRE to Fire Safe Sonoma, a 501(c)(3) non-profit.
- b. The operators of the project are different. The County's program is operated by Permit Sonoma Fire Prevention Division. This project is operated by Safer West County and the four local fire departments: Occidental Volunteer Fire Department, Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (serving Camp Meeker), Monte Rio Fire Protection District, and Sonoma County Fire District (serving Forestville).
- c. The geography is different: The County's program serves properties located in all unincorporated areas of Sonoma County. This project serves properties located in these western Sonoma County communities: Camp Meeker, Forestville, Monte Rio, and Occidental.