



Sonoma Valley Fire District

630 Second Street West, Sonoma CA 95476 - 707-996-2102

ZONE 0 (DRAFT GUIDE)

The 5-Foot Ember-Resistant Zone - What Property Owners Need to Know When the Regulations Become Effective

This guide summarizes the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's Zone 0 defensible space regulations (14 CCR §§ 1298.04 / 1299.03), based on the August 19, 2026 deliberative draft. Requirements may change before the regulation is finalized - check with the Fire Prevention Bureau for the current effective rule and your compliance deadline.

Where Does Zone 0 Apply?

Zone 0 does not apply everywhere -it applies within two distinct areas, each governed by a different section of the draft regulation:

- State Responsibility Area (SRA) -land where CAL FIRE has primary fire protection responsibility (§ 1299 et seq.).
- Local Responsibility Area (LRA), but only within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) - areas protected by local agencies such as cities, counties, or fire districts, that are also mapped as VHFHSZ (§ 1298 et seq.).

Plain LRA land that is not mapped as a VHFHSZ is not covered by this regulation. Districts with a mix of LRA, SRA, and LRA-VHFHSZ.

Who Wrote These Rules, and Why?

The California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board of Forestry) is drafting and adopting these regulations under Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations. As of this guide, the rule remains a deliberative draft and has not yet been finalized.

Legal Authority

- Government Code § 51182 - authorizes the LRA/VHFHSZ defensible space requirements (§ 1298).
- Public Resources Code §§ 4290 and 4291 - authorize the parallel SRA defensible space requirements (§ 1299).
- Additional cross-referenced statutes (Gov. Code §§ 51178, 51179, 51181, 51183, 51186; Health & Safety Code §§ 18908, 18917) support definitions and related provisions, including the ADU exemption.

Stated Purpose

- Create an ember-resistant zone immediately around occupied structures.
- Improve safety for firefighters defending a structure during a wildfire.



Sonoma Valley Fire District

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- Increase the likelihood that a structure survives a wildfire event - ember intrusion in the area closest to a home is a leading cause of home ignition.

For LRA/VHFHSZ properties, local agencies may adopt alternative compliance practices, provided they are approved by the local governing body and produce substantially similar practical effects, and are at least as protective as required under Public Resources Code § 4117.

What Is Zone 0?

Zone 0 is the 5 feet of space immediately surrounding your home or other occupied structure - including attached decks, stairs, and pergolas. It is the single most important area for stopping wind-blown embers from igniting your home during a wildfire.

- Zone 0 begins at the exterior surface of your wall, roof, attached deck, stairs, or pergola.
- It extends out 5 feet, or to your property line - whichever comes first.
- Detached buildings under 120 sq ft not used for habitation ("outbuildings", e.g. sheds) are treated differently - see "Outbuildings" below.

If a neighbor builds a new structure (including an ADU) near your property line, you are not required to create additional defensible space on your own property, and you cannot be found out of compliance because of it.

The Core Rule

With limited exceptions listed below, no combustible materials are allowed anywhere in Zone 0. This includes fallen leaves and needles, bark or wood mulch, and other combustible debris. (Inspectors may allow temporary mulch for erosion control during construction or emergencies.)

Requirement Checklist

1. Roof & Gutters

- Keep clear of leaves, needles, and other combustible debris.

2. Under Decks, Balconies, Pergolas & Stairs

- Keep the space underneath free of vegetation and combustible items.

3. Firewood

- No firewood storage anywhere within Zone 0.

4. Trees in Zone 0

- No dead or dying branches.



Sonoma Valley Fire District

630 Second Street West, Sonoma CA 95476 - 707-996-2102

- Live branches must stay at least 10 ft from chimneys and stovepipe outlets.
- Do not allow live branches beneath eaves.
- Remove ladder fuels - in the first 6 ft above ground, or the bottom 1/3 of the tree's height (whichever is smaller) - plus any fuel within 5 ft above the roof that creates a high risk of fire spread.
- Where there is no eave, live branches must be at least 5 ft above the roof and at least 1 ft from the walls.

5. Vegetation-Free Buffers Around Vulnerable Areas

Certain parts of your home are most vulnerable to embers - wall edges, areas under eaves, glass, vents, and posts. No vegetation is allowed in these buffer areas:

Location in Zone 0	Vegetation-Free Buffer Required
Under any eave	No vegetation at all
Along walls with no eave	1 ft minimum from the wall (or to the eave, whichever is farther - up to 5 ft)
Around windows, doors, posts, vents	2 ft minimum, all sides
Around attached decks, stairs, pergolas	5 ft minimum from the edge

6. Where Vegetation IS Allowed

Outside the buffer areas above (at least 1 ft from the structure, not under an eave, and at least 2 ft from windows, doors, or vents), limited vegetation is permitted:

Plant Type	Rules - Only in Areas Where Vegetation Is Otherwise Allowed (see buffer table above)
Lawns & ground cover under 3" tall	Allowed if well-maintained, non-woody, and free of dead or dying material
Plants 3–18" tall	Allowed if non-woody, dead-material-free, planted in clusters ≤ 1 sq ft, and spaced apart by $1.5\times$ the tallest plant's height
Potted plants	Allowed if in unaffixed, noncombustible pots ≤ 5 -gallon capacity, plant $\leq 18"$ tall, pots spaced $1.5\times$ plant height apart



Sonoma Valley Fire District

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7. Fences & Gates

- Combustible fences and gates may not be attached to the structure.
- Any fence or gate attached to - or within 1 ft of - the structure needs a 5-ft noncombustible section starting at the point of attachment.
- Going forward, no new combustible fences or gates may be installed within 5 ft of the structure.
- Repairs to an existing combustible fence may still use combustible materials.

8. Outbuildings

- Sheds and similar structures are not allowed within Zone 0 unless built entirely of noncombustible materials.

Compliance Timeline

New structures must meet every Zone 0 requirement immediately. Existing structures are phased in over time, giving property owners a chance to plan the work:

Structure Type	What Must Be Done	By When
New structures	All Zone 0 requirements	Immediately (effective date)
Existing structures	Roof/gutters clear; no dead or dying tree branches; branches 10 ft from chimneys; branches not under eaves; no firewood storage in zone 0	Immediately (effective date)
Existing structures	No combustibles in Zone 0; clear under decks/stairs; ladder fuels removed; branch clearance from roof/walls	Within 3 years
Existing structures	Vulnerable-area vegetation clearances; approved vegetation only; fence/gate rules; outbuilding rules	Within 3–5 years (local agency sets exact date)

Timelines above reflect the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) provisions (§ 1298.04(c)). Properties in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) follow a similar phase-in under § 1299.03(e), final phase completed within 5 years (or on a Director-set timeline of at least 3 years).