

Many people live in the *Urban Wildland Interface* (UWI). The UWI is not a specific geographical area, but any location where homes are built in or adjacent to the forests or grasslands.

During the 80's, many Texans moved from the city and the suburbs to more peaceful, rural settings. While Texas' wildland communities have grown, volunteer fire departments that serve them have not, often being under-equipped and understaffed. Protection for some homes may be minimal if wildland fire approaches.

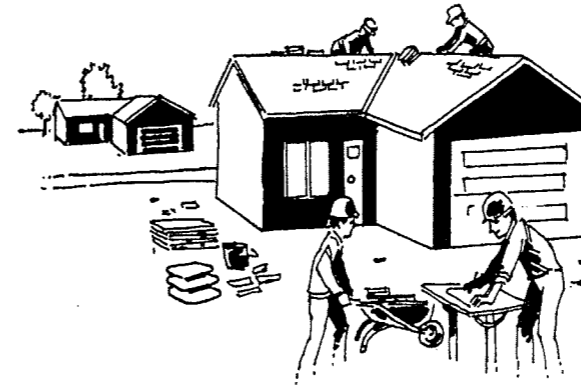
A few simple steps to establish a defensible space on your property can greatly reduce the chances of a wildfire destroying your dream home. A defensible space is an area surrounding one's home or other property, in which vegetation, and sometimes the structure itself, has been modified to remove potential fuels, preventing fire from reaching the property.

Defensible space, as the name implies, creates a space within which firefighters may safely work to protect the property. It may keep a fire from moving into a structure by removing combustible materials next to the building, such as deep grass, shrubbery, debris or firewood. It can also prevent a structure fire from moving into the wildlands and on to other structures.

Want to create defensible space?
Here's how.

Modify the Vegetation

- ✓ Within the area chosen to be the defensible space, thin trees and brush so they are 10 to 15 feet apart at the widest part.
- ✓ Remove shrubs and smaller trees if they are beneath larger trees.
- ✓ Prune branches of trees to a height of 10 feet.
- ✓ Isolate flowerbeds and gardens, surrounding them with a non-flammable ground cover.
- ✓ Keep grasses well irrigated and mowed to approximately 2" or less.
- ✓ Clear needles and leaves from roofs and gutters.



Modify the Structure

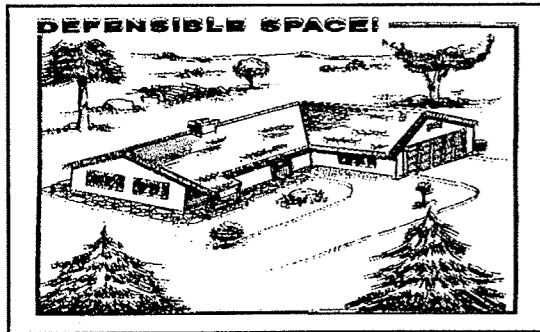
- ✓ Use fire resistant building materials, especially on the roof.
- ✓ Install chimney screens or spark arrestors.
- ✓ Enclose porches, foundations and roof or attic openings to prevent debris from collecting.
- ✓ Post your name and address in 3" letters so firefighters can find your property.
- ✓ Provide adequate driveway and turnaround space for emergency vehicles.
- ✓ Protect windows and glass doors with fire resistant drapes or internal shutters.
- ✓ Develop external water supplies, such as cisterns, dry hydrants, ponds or swimming pools.
- ✓ Keep tools, such as hoes, rakes, shovels, axes and connected garden hoses, readily available for fire suppression.

Creating Your Defensible Space

You know how to modify the plants and the buildings on your property to build your defensible space. Now, how much area do you have to clear and landscape? To determine the area of the defensible space surrounding your home, use the following formula.

Defensible Space = 1.5 times the height of the building + 30 feet

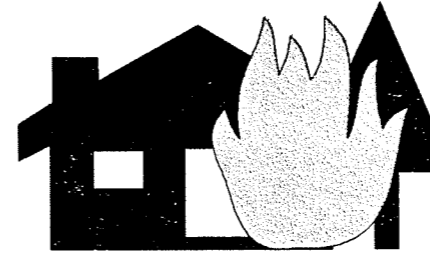
For example, a single story house is 18 feet tall. Using the formula, $1.5 \times 18 \text{ feet} = 27 \text{ feet}$. Adding the extra 30 feet, you have a total distance of 57 feet. The defensible space surrounding this house should extend out 57 feet all the way around.



There are other considerations when calculating defensible space. Under most circumstances, fire moves rapidly uphill. A home built on or near a slope requires more space between it and surrounding fuels. For each degree of slope over 10° , the defensible space should be increased by one foot.

So, the single story house referred to in the first example, built on a slope of 15° , would have an additional five feet of space, or a total of 63 feet around it. Maintaining this space may keep a wildfire at a safe distance.

Building a Barrier Between



Your Home & Wildfire

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