



Los Altos Hills County Fire District
Frequently Asked Questions about Vegetation Management
October 23, 2021

The following FAQ and General Comments provide information pertaining to trees and vegetation on private property and are offered to assist residents and the community plan, prepare and implement wildfire prevention measures.

FAQ from Residents

1. What are the resources and programs for residents to prepare for wildfires on their property?

Residents are receiving frequent information about preparedness for wildfire and fire hazards from the media and various sources on the importance of using techniques of property hygiene (cutting and removing brush, tree limbs, hazardous vegetation on their property to reduce threat and damages from wildfires). Residents recognize with the recent wildland fires, that embers drift and with certain wind conditions, can ignite homes, trees and brush to create the spread of fire. The District encourages residents to learn how to manage their property hygiene and create defensible space around their home and structures to protect their property and life and the property and life of neighbors. Workshops for creation of defensible space are frequently available for residents. Check www.lahcfd.org for workshop information.

2. What can I do to make my property safe from dead, dying or Eucalyptus trees?

Residents are encouraged to contact an arborist or tree company for an evaluation of their trees and an estimate for trimming or removal.

3. What's new in creating defensible space?

Here are some best practices:

- The addition of the immediate zone (0-5 feet from buildings, decks and other structures) for creating defensible space.
- Use noncombustible materials such as rock, stone pavers, cement, bare earth, gravel, or sand around homes and buildings.
- Remove all plants and shrubs near windows and abutting the home and buildings.
- Remove all leaves, needles, or other debris that fall in the 0-5 foot zone of the home and buildings.

4. What are my resources for information?

- LAHCFD Chipping Information:
<https://www.lahcfd.org/programs-for-residents/dsbc-program/>
- Defensible Space Fuel Reduction Monthly Drop off:
<https://www.lahcfd.org/programs-for-residents/yard-waste-drop-off/>
- Local Tree Contractors:

- Agri-con (408) 209-6895
- Bay Area Tree (408) 728-7570
- Huertas (408) 903-3850
- S.P. McClenahan (650) 326-8781
- Other resource links for wildfire preparedness:
 - Santa Clara County FireSafe Council - Reducing Wildfire Risk:
<https://sccfiresafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ReducingWildfireRisksHIZ.pdf>
 - Santa Clara Central Fire Protection District - Wildfire Preparedness:
<https://www.sccfd.org/education-and-preparedness-overview/wildfire-preparedness>

This FAQ will be updated in accordance with program and operational considerations that are based on principles of fire science and best practices for wildland urban area fire protection.

General Comments

Property owners are responsible for the care, safety and removal of brush and trees on their property. The District offers many programs to assist residents. These programs are designed to augment fire prevention and build resident and community fire resiliency. District programs do not replace property owners' obligations for maintenance, safety and removal of brush or hazardous vegetation that includes dead or dying trees on their property.

Los Altos Hills County Fire District (District or LAHCFD) had a prior dead, dying and Eucalyptus tree removal program. The program was retired in March 2020. This was due to multiple factors including the increasing requests from residents for removal of their private trees, lack of District funding to fulfil these requests, and recommendation from the Santa Clara County auditors to end the program, which was approved by the County Board of Supervisors (BOS). The BOS approved the audit recommendation for LAHCFD to:

End the discretionary tree service program and re-direct the funds to services expressly designed to improve the ability of properties in the Fire District to survive wildfire. While such efforts could include tree pruning and removal to reduce the amount of flammable material, public funding of such services should result in demonstrably reduced overall fire risk within the District.

The District established an Integrated Hazardous Fuel Reduction Program that complies with this recommendation. Residential programs for fire fuel reduction provided by LAHCFD are found at <https://www.lahcfd.org/programs-for-residents/>

Removal of dead, dying and Eucalyptus trees on private property is the responsibility of the individual property owner. The District cannot participate in discretionary tree removal services but can utilize funds for hazardous fuel reduction services that reduce overall fire risks for the community.

Additionally, LAHCFD has constructed evacuation routes along main road corridors in LAHCFD. Two projects were completed on Page Mill Road and another project is currently in the permissions stage with residents on Moody/El Monte Roads.

For more information about the Moody and El Monte Roads Evacuation Route Project, visit: <https://sccfiresafe.org/projects/moody-evac-route/>

A list of Moody/El Monte Road FAQs is also available here:

https://www.lahcfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ElMonte_MoodyRdProject_FAQs.pdf

Read the latest article about the Moody/El Monty Road evacuation route and road hardening project in the Los Altos Town Crier, here:

https://www.losaltosonline.com/news/work-planned-to-shore-up-los-altos-hills-fire-evacuation-route/article_bfb2fe-e98a-11eb-bf9b-57c72c22a87f.html

The District is also providing regional fire protection, such as funding for the fire crews at Palo Alto Fire Station 8 in partnership with County fire Department and the Palo Alto Fire Department.

<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/bay-area-fire-stations-increase-staffing-given-dangerous-weather-conditions/2597935/>

A Strategic Community Fuel Break is currently in the development process with Midpeninsula Open Space District. The LAHCFD Board of Commissioners received a report on the project at its August 17, 2021 meeting.

- Watch the presentation and view the memorandum report, Item 10.A. and accompanying slides, Item 10.A. Attachment 2, here (this item is discussed at the 50:27 minute mark): <https://www.lahcfd.org/download/august-17-2021-fire-district-commission-meeting/>

Also, please check out the LAHCFD Goat Grazing video for another example of fire fuel mitigation to benefit the community. <https://www.lahcfd.org/video/vegetation-mitigation-goats2/>

Although the LAHCFD discretionary dead tree removal program is retired, the many programs that emerged as integrated hazardous fuel reductions initiatives provide residential, community and regional protections. These programs are a more effective and strategic use of taxpayers' funds.