

Welcome back to our show, "7 Saturdays to a Fire-Resistant Home," where we're learning simple tips to build a safer and more fire-resilient home. In this episode, we'll continue to learn more ways to create defensible space. We'll start by showing you the right way to cut dead grass around your home, then we're going to learn ways to create clearance between plants to reduce the likelihood of fire spreading, and finally, we'll learn why it's important to create a hundred feet of defensible space around your home. I'm your host, Alicia Mason, and I'm joined by former chief of the CAL FIRE Butte Unit and now senior public safety specialist at PG&E, David Hawks.

Thanks for having me back, Alicia. Today we're going to show you some simple and important ways to build a lean, clean, and green area up to 100 feet around your home. The best part is that all of this can be done in just a couple hours on a Saturday.

Okay, lean, clean, and green. I like the rhyming, but what does it mean in terms of protecting your properties?

It means that maintaining the area around your home, keeping your lawn, plants, shrubs well irrigated and green, and ensuring that dead grass and other vegetation is cut or removed.

Okay, well, makes sense to me. Okay, so what's first?

Well, now that we've done the work around the home, the first five feet and the home itself, now we need to look at our yard. So we need to look at things like the next 30 feet. 5 to 30 feet in that 25-foot area should be lean and green. Well-irrigated, green landscaping. That's really important. Anything that's dead should be cut down or completely removed, preferably. And then from there, we'll look to the next zone, which is from 30 to 100 feet. Property owners are required to clear a hundred foot of defensible space or to their property line. So when we're looking at the next 70 feet, from 30 to 100, we really want to reduce the fuels in that zone. It's okay to have native fuels but they need to be reduced. We're concerned about horizontal spacing between bushes and also vertical spacing between things that are on the forest floor, around your yard, and landscaping and trees so that fire doesn't ladder up into those trees.

So this isn't just a chore my parents used to make me do. It's important to keep your home more fire-resistant.

Absolutely. It's not only important to keep your home more fire-resistant, it's important to help firefighters safely defend your home.

So when should we be doing these activities?

Well, first off, you should never use a lawnmower on dry grass. That can cause a spark and cause a fire. Lawnmowers are meant for well green, irrigated lawns. You should use a weed eater or a string trimmer on dead and dry grass and that should be done early in the morning, preferably before 10AM, once the grass is dead and dry in the summer months and never do it

on a day that it's really hot and dry or windy or when the National Weather Service has issued a Red Flag Warning. Let me show you.

Okay.

Now that we have our protective equipment, we're gonna go cut the weeds to four inches.

Okay, so why four inches?

Well, it's important that we reduce the fuels and keep the grass low. So keeping it four inches or less keeps that fuel down on the ground very, very low where the intensity of the fire would be reduced.

Let's go do that.

All right, let's do it.

So now that we've taken care of the dead weeds, what about these bushes here?

Great question, Alicia. Just like people, bushes need spacing. Too many bushes in close proximity allow fire to spread from bush to bush and increase fire intensity. It's important that we separate bushes by either thinning them out or removing some altogether. It's really important that we have two times the height spacing between bushes. So a three-foot bush should have six foot of spacing from one bush to the next.

Okay. So have you seen something like this burn in a fire?

Absolutely. Ladder fuels routinely occur in fires, especially in a forest environment where we have brush and trees in combination. This routinely happens where fire moves from the ground to the bush and into the trees, into the crowns, and it's very difficult to control that fire. It also adds to fire intensity and spotting.

Wow, okay, I'm glad we talked about that. So let's go find some bushes to cut.

All right, absolutely.

Okay.

This is the kind of tree that we're talking about right here. It's too close to the tree behind you and the one behind me and it needs to be removed. If we don't remove this tree, it will add to fire intensity and increase the potential for fire to move from bush to bush. So let's cut it off.

Okay, and how far should we cut it down?

That's a great question. We should cut it as close to the base as possible but no higher than six inches.

Perfect, okay.

Okay, let's do it.

All right.

And this guy here, once we get it down, it should take care of it.

There we go.

Now let's pick it up, put it in the green waste.

Okay. Okay, so now that we've taken care of the bushes, what is the last step?

The last step is trees. Small, immature trees or trees that are standing alone should be limbed up at least six feet from the surface of the ground. Larger trees or trees that have understory vegetation like this below them should be limbed up three times the height of that vegetation. You need to make sure that you have at least 10 foot of spacing between the crowns of trees once they reach maturity. If your property is sloped, make sure to give them plenty of space from each other, at least double the amount that you would give them on flat ground. It's important that homeowners do this as a part of that hundred-foot defensible space.

Well, that's great, and we all wanna do our part as Californians.

Absolutely, and I see it all across the state, people doing their part to help create defensible space so it makes it easier and safer for firefighters to defend their homes.

Great. Congratulations to everyone at home. Throughout the course of these two episodes, you've learned simple and efficient ways to prepare your home for an emergency. Make sure to share what you learned with your family, friends, and those you know in fire-prone areas.

And we're not done yet, Alicia. We still have more things to teach everyone.

Great, what are we learning next week?

Next week, we're gonna be learning three affordable ways to harden your homes from wildfire.

I can't wait. If you missed our first episode of "7 Saturdays to a Fire-Resistant Home," go to safetyactioncenter.pge.com to watch past episodes and learn more preparedness tips. We'll see you next week.