



ANTHONY C. MARRONE
 INTERIM FIRE CHIEF
 FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

*"Proud Protectors of Life,
 the Environment, and Property"*

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT

1320 NORTH EASTERN AVENUE
 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90063-3294
 (323) 881-2401
www.fire.lacounty.gov



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February 15, 2023

TO: KINDON MEIK
 CITY MANAGER, CITY OF CALABASAS

FROM: DREW SMITH
 ASSISTANT FIRE CHIEF, DIVISION 7

SUBJECT: BRUSH CLEARANCE INSPECTION PROGRAM

This letter is meant to help clarify new requirements and changes to our Annual Brush Clearance Inspection Program, as we are aware that many of your residents have recently received Brush Clearance Notices from our Department for the first time.

As you know, the City of Calabasas falls under the designation of either High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (HFHSZ / VHFHSZ), as classified by CAL Fire ([FHSZ Viewer](#)). Our Department has historically conducted brush clearance inspections on Single-Family Dwellings (homes) in your city. In the past, these homes were identified through fire history and visual identification, and we focused our inspections on areas which were deemed to be the most vulnerable to brush fires.

For decades, up until 2021, the number of homes that have been subject to annual inspections in the City of Calabasas has averaged approximately 2,300. This year, that number will increase to approximately 5,350. Across Battalion 5, the total number of inspections has increased by over 7,500.

This increase in the total number of homes to be inspected is attributable to Public Resources Code 4291 (PRC-4291) along with our Department's recent acquisition of GIS/mapping software that allows us to identify all homes within fire hazard severity zones. The new technology allows greater accuracy and some structures have been identified for the first time

PRC-4291 stipulates that all homes within the fire hazard severity zones receive an annual brush clearance inspection, and has been in place for decades. The new mapping software is the reason the number of parcels has increased, and our inspection list will now encompass all eligible homes from this year forward. All Single-Family Dwellings have been added this year; Multi-Family Dwellings will be added next year. Integrating this mapping technology into our Brush Clearance Inspection Program ensures that all homes that require inspections are receiving them.

In addition, recent legislation introduces a new requirement to the brush clearance inspections. Assembly Bill 3074 (AB-3074) establishes Zone 0, which is a 5-foot Ember Resistant Zone that requires the removal of all flammable materials within 5 feet of any structure.

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Although the Zone 0 requirement will not be enforced until sometime in 2024, we will be using this year's inspections to educate property owners about what they will need to do to become compliant with Zone 0 requirements next year.

The County Health & Safety Code has authorized a brush inspection fee since 1989; currently, this fee is \$151.00. Our Department had never imposed this fee until last year, when the increase in inspections began throughout the County. Working with the Board of Supervisors, we agreed to phase in the fee over a three-year period. Last year, the fee was \$50.00 (to be billed on 2023 property tax bill), this year the fee will be \$100.00 (to be billed on the 2024 property tax bill), and next year, the fee will be assessed in its entirety of \$151.00 (to be billed on the 2025 property tax bill).

It is important to note that this fee is not intended to generate revenue for the Department. With the significant increase in inspections to be completed, the inspection fee will offset the Department's costs in an effort to keep the Brush Clearance Inspection Program cost-neutral.

2023 inspections are scheduled to begin on **May 1 in the City of Calabasas**.

For your reference, the general requirements for brush clearance and maintaining defensible space are:

- Zone 0 (5-foot Ember Resistant Zone) – removal of any flammable materials within 5 feet of any structure. ***Enforcement of this requirement will begin in 2024.***
- Removal of flammable vegetation within 30 feet of any structure (up to 50 feet in VHFHSZ).
 - Plants and trees are permitted, provided they are individually planted, spaced, and maintained in such a manner that they do not form a means of transmitting fire from native growth to the structure.
- Remaining vegetation for the next 70 feet, for a total of 100 feet, shall be limbed and include removal of any dead wood (maximum of 200 feet clearance can be required in VHFHSZ).
- Access roads must maintain 10 feet of brush clearance on each side and shall maintain adequate vertical clearance.
- Fire hydrants shall maintain clearance of 3 feet.

In addition to what is outlined above, there is one more piece of legislation that affects property owners. Assembly Bill 38 (AB-38), commonly referred to as Real Estate Defensible Space Inspections, took effect on July 1, 2021. AB-38 requires that the seller of a property in fire hazard severity zones must submit documentation of a compliant defensible space inspection prior to the close of escrow. Homes that received their annual brush clearance inspection within 6 months of close of escrow can use that inspection, if compliant, to satisfy this requirement.

More information on AB-38, AB-3074, and brush clearance/defensible space requirements can be found [here](#).

The Annual Brush Clearance Inspection Program is critical for those living in fire hazard severity zones. Creating defensible space through brush clearance, coupled with home hardening, greatly improves the chance that a house will survive a wildfire. It also provides firefighters a safer area to work in while defending homes and property.

If you have any questions, or need anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.