

## [Public Safety](#)

### **Strict Wildfire Safety Rules will Soon Apply to Much of Urban San Diego**

By [Andrew Bowen](#) / Metro Reporter

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San Diego is preparing to enforce new wildfire safety regulations for defensible space around homes. KPBS metro reporter Andrew Bowen says they'll apply in most of the city.

San Diego is preparing to enforce new wildfire safety regulations that ban landscaping and flammable materials within five feet of most homes in the city.

Last month, the San Diego City Council adopted new regulations for the city's "very high fire hazard severity zones," which cover roughly [two-thirds of the city](#). They include both suburban-style neighborhoods like Scripps Ranch and Carmel Valley, as well as parts of densely populated urban neighborhoods like downtown, Bankers Hill and Hillcrest.

Among the most controversial regulations are those that apply to "zone zero" — a five-foot buffer zone surrounding a structure — where combustible materials will be banned. That could include wood fences, trellises, sheds, small trees, shrubs, flowers, wood-based mulch, grass and synthetic lawns.

The regulations are required under a 2020 law called AB 3074. The [California Bureau of Forestry](#) is expected to finalize the precise regulations — including possible exemptions for less flammable plants like succulents — in the coming months.

San Diego Deputy Fire Chief Tony Tosca said recent fire science has found when the weather is dry and windy, embers can be swept into the air and ignite homes that are blocks, or even miles away from a fire's front line.

"You could have an ember cast, a singular ember, and you have ember load, which is multiple embers just raining down on a structure," Tosca said. "And one of those, if that gets into the structure, increases the likelihood that that's going to transmit fire to that structure."

Tosca said regulations take effect in February 2026 for new construction and February 2027 for existing homes.

Assistant Fire Marshal Daniel Hypes said the rules are also meant to protect the fire department's resources in the event of a major fire storm, such as the 2003 Cedar Fire or the 2007 Witch Fire.

"We know we can protect homes if it's one or two structures threatened," Hypes said. "But when we get thousands of homes, we need a lot of those homes to be able to survive without the firefighters being able to protect each individual one."

Tosca said the city does not have the bandwidth to strictly enforce the new regulations, but will instead seek to [educate](#) homeowners on how to comply. He added that insurers may start requiring compliance before the city is able to fully enforce the regulations.

"People can request a [home risk assessment](#)," Tosca said. "It's highly educational. We start from the roof line all the way down to the side of the structure, and then we go out from there onto the fuel modification zones or defensible space areas."

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I cover local government — a broad beat that includes housing, homelessness and infrastructure. I'm especially interested in the intersections of land use, transportation and climate change.