



VENTURA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU
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ADMINISTRATIVE RULING 806 APPLICABILITY OF VCFD STANDARD 515

APPROVED BY: _____


FIRE MARSHAL

Subject:

2020 Ventura County Fire Code, Appendix W, Sections W104 and W105. Installation, maintenance and spacing of plants, trees and other vegetation within required defensible space and fuel modification zones within Ventura County and VCFD Standard 515.

Code Requirements:

Ventura County Fire Code (VCFC) and State Codes: Public Resource Code (PRC) 4291 & Government Code (GC) 51182, require a minimum 100-foot defensible space zone around buildings.

The codes specify that the amount of vegetation clearance needs to be such that it will not form a means of rapidly transmit fire from other nearby vegetation to a structure or from a structure to nearby vegetation. It does not specify any spacing requirements of plants and vegetation within the defensible space zone. Ventura County Fire Department is required to enforce at a minimum the Calfire requirement within defensible space zones.

Discussion:

To provide written spacing specifications for design, installation and maintenance of plant, trees and vegetation, a tree and Fuel Mosaic spacing requirement was first introduced under VCFPD Ordinance 27 January 1, 2011 and carried forward under Ordinance 28 and Ordinance 30.

Review of defensible space zones that did not have any spacing between plants, trees and vegetation that would fall within the current fuel mosaic requirements indicated too much dead understory and material within the landscaped and mosaic area. There was concern regarding the amount of heat and ember production this would create. Additional review was conducted of the recent fires within Ventura County and Los Angeles County over the past three years. Areas that did

not have any spacing and or where too large of a fuel mosaic existed, had the fire burn completely through the defensible space zone exposing homes to greater heat, flames and embers.

Additionally, over the past years, other fire agencies, including Calfire, have issued plant and tree spacing requirements for defensible space zones.

To address the concerns regarding excessive fuel loading within defensible space zones, including current fuel mosaic requirements, and to protect life and property, a new VCFD Standard 515 *Defensible Space and Fuel Modification Zones* was issued April 19, 2019 to specify spacing requirements for plants, trees and vegetation within a defensible space zone. This Administrative Ruling addresses the applicability of Standard 515 as it relates to VCFD Ordinance 31, Appendix W. Prior tree, plant and fuel mosaic requirements of Ordinance 30 Sections W105.1.1 and W105.1.2 were repealed April 19, 2019 and replaced with Standard 515 under the previous version of Administrative Ruling 806 issued April 19, 2019.

Requirements:

Standard 515 is applicable to all new required defensible space and fuel modification zones (FMZ) and any replanting in existing defensible space and FMZ.

Standard 515, Chapter 4, has retro-fit provisions for defensible space and FMZ in existence prior to April 19, 2019. Upon notification by the fire department, there is a four (4) year period in which to bring the existing installation into reasonable compliance with VCFD Standard 515. It is not the intent of the VCFD to require indiscriminate removal of trees and vegetation, but to reduce the risk of fire exposure to persons and buildings by thinning, reducing and possible removal of vegetative fuels within the defensible space / FMZ to provide reasonable compliance with Standard 515.

Retro-Fit Process:

VCFD Fire Hazard reduction Program (FHRP) Unit will notify property owners (or their representative) that the defensible space / FMZ on their property is subject to retro-fit under Standard 515. The FHRP unit will meet on-site with the owner to conduct a survey of the defensible space / FMZ to determine how the requirements of Standard 515 will apply to the existing area, identify priority areas, and answer any questions that may arise. For larger properties (EG. HOA common area, government owned open space parcel, etc), a plan and time table may be required to be submitted for review and approval by the FHRP unit.

For additional information or for questions regarding this Administrative Ruling, please contact the FHRP Unit Manager at 805-389-9759 or email fhrrp@ventura.org