



GUIDELINE 421 COMBUSTIBLE FENCING IN DEFENSIBLE SPACE ZONES

Purpose:

Defensible space and fuel modification zone provisions are intended to mitigate the risk to life and structures from intrusion of fire from wildland fire exposures, fires from adjacent structures, and to mitigate fires from spreading to wildland fuels that may threaten to destroy life, overwhelm fire suppression capabilities, or result in large property loss. Home and building loss during wildfires occur from one or more of the three basic wildfire exposures: 1) Embers, 2) Radiant heat, and 3) Direct flame contact.

Review of previous wildland fires, and newer laboratory testing, has shown that combustibles fences are a contributing factor in fire spread to buildings. To help reduce the risk of ignition of fences and spread of fence fires to buildings, the Ventura County Fire Department has enacted requirements for new combustible fencing and retrofit of existing combustible fencing. These new requirements only apply to combustible fencing when located within five (5) feet of a building that is in a Fire Hazard Severity Zone or local Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) zone. Ventura County Fire Code (VCFC) Chapter 49, Section 4905.4. is listed here:

VCFC Definition:

COMBUSTIBLE FENCING. Any fencing material or installation that is not IGNITION-RESISTANT MATERIAL (as defined by CBC Chapter 7A). Combustible fencing includes wood, plastic, and other petroleum based, fence materials

VCFC Section 4905.4:

4905.4 Fencing.

4905.4.1 Scope. This section only applies to fences, including gates within the fencing, within 5 feet of building(s) that are in the WUI area.

4905.4.2 New fencing. New fencing and gates installed on or after January 1, 2023, shall comply with the following:

1. Combustible fencing shall not be installed back-to-back. Two parallel combustible fences shall be separated by at least 5 feet.
2. There shall be no mulch, combustible vegetation, or any other combustible material lined at the bottom and within 12 inches on each side of combustible fences.
3. Fencing and gates that are not parallel to the building, and are within 5 feet of the building, shall be of non-combustible material.

4905.4.3 Existing fencing. Fencing installed prior to January 1, 2023, may remain.

Exception: The entire fencing not parallel and within 5 feet of the building, including gates within the fencing, shall be of non-combustible material when any portion of existing fencing within 5 feet is being replaced. Fencing beyond 5 feet from the building is not required to be replaced with non-combustible material.

While VCFC Section 4905.4 may not apply to your property or project, the Fire Department highly recommends installation of non-combustible fencing and replacement of existing combustible fencing when located within 5 feet of a building.

Resource Links:

IBHS: <https://ibhs.org/risk-research/wildfire/>
<https://wildfireprepared.org/article/how-to-maintain-your-homes-defensible-space/>

NIST: <https://www.nist.gov/wildland-urban-interface-fire>
<https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2022/08/nist-study-finds-wildfire-hazards-residential-fences-and-mulch-beds>

UCANR: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/Prepare/Building/Fencing/>

WILDFIRE TODAY: <https://wildfiretoday.com/2022/08/17/researchers-evaluate-how-fences-and-mulch-can-spread-fires-and-ignite-structures/>

Please contact the FHRP unit at frp@ventura.org or (805) 389-9759 if you have any questions regarding these items or visit our website vcfd.org or vcfhrp.org for additional information regarding fire hazard clearance requirements.