



PETALUMA FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU
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FIRE PREVENTION GUIDELINE: WEED ABATEMENT
EFFECTIVE DATE: 1/25/11
CODE REFERENCES: 2010 CALIFORNIA FIRE CODE (CFC), PETALUMA MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 1720, CITY OF PETALUMA RESOLUTION DECLARING WEEDS A NUISANCE, TITLE 19
NOTE: <i>THIS GUIDELINE IS A SUMMARY OF FIRE DEPARTMENT CLARIFICATIONS OF CITY AND STATE CODES. INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN APPLIES TO TYPICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND MAY NOT ADDRESS ALL SITUATIONS.</i>

SCOPE

This guideline is necessary to provide fire control points and to create or maintain a defensible space around buildings and property lines. Creating defensible space will help minimize fire damage and provide a space or fuel break where firefighters can defend against fire.

CODES AND STANDARDS

Weeds, grass, vines or other growth that are capable of endangering property shall be cut down and removed by the owner or occupant of the premises. Vegetation clearance requirements in the wildland-urban interface areas shall be in accordance with CFC Chapter 49, CFC Section 304.1.2: Vegetation and Title 19, Division 1§307(b): Clearances.

GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

The Petaluma Fire Department’s Weed Abatement Program is staffed with one (1) part-time seasonal inspector who inspects both public and private properties for unabated hazardous and/or combustible fuels which would allow a fire to travel from one property or structure to the next. Weed Abatement insures that property owners maintain a “defensible space” around their properties that would allow firefighters to effectively stop fires from spreading from open space areas to homes and other structures.

Each year, the program begins with the Petaluma City Council, through resolution, declaring weeds to be a public nuisance, and the public is duly noticed. Weed Abatement notices are mailed to properties where a problem is anticipated or where the property, if not abated, can pose a threat during the dry season.

The notice lists basic requirements and a date by which the abatement must be performed (approximately May 31st, depending on rainfall). After the compliance date, Fire Department personnel will begin to inspect properties to ensure compliance has been met.

If you receive a Weed Abatement Notice from the Petaluma Fire Department, it is important to act promptly. If any portion of your property is not in compliance, you must take steps to abate the problem prior to the inspection date listed on the notice. No additional letters or warnings will be sent after the noted inspection date. If the property is determined to be a hazard after the inspection date, a City-authorized contracted crew will be sent to the property to abate the hazard at the expense of you, the property owner, and an administrative fee will be imposed.

It is important to know that inspections are conducted throughout the dry season, and the property must be maintained in order to remain in compliance. Even if a property owner abates their property early in the season, there is potential for re-growth. If at any time the property is determined to be a hazard, the property may be forcefully abated without additional notice.

If a property is determined a hazard and is forcefully abated, the property owner will receive a bill for the work completed by the City's contractor in addition to an administrative fee imposed by the City. Unpaid costs will be added to the County's secured tax rolls as a lien against the property.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

For properties with yearly special needs, instructions or problems, a letter will be sent instructing the property owner on how to abate.

1. ABATEMENT CRITERIA

Parcels five (5) acres or less must have all combustible growth cut or removed.

Larger parcels shall maintain a minimum disked perimeter around the property, turning the soil in such a way as to bury all vegetation. Where larger parcels are being disked, additional fuel breaks may be required to divide the property into smaller areas that would separate large amounts of fuel. The disked trail should be a minimum of 30' wide.

A defensible space of 30'-100', depending on grade and other factors, around all structures, either man-made or natural, in which material is capable of allowing fire to spread unchecked, must be cleared, treated or modified to slow the rate and intensity of an approaching fire.

Roadways, driveways and Fire Department access roads shall be cleared of combustible vegetation equal to the width of the road plus ten feet (10') on both sides.

The property owner must also mitigate any additional fire hazard(s) that are determined by the City's Fire Chief.

Mowing is acceptable where disking is impractical or inappropriate. These areas would include, but are not limited to, biologically sensitive areas or habitats. These are

particularly sensitive areas found along the Petaluma River Walk as it passes the Factory Outlets, Industrial Avenue, etc.

Mowing with a tractor is sometimes impractical due to terrain, among other things. Mowing with a handheld weed-eater is acceptable and referred to as “handwork”.

In some cases, use of goats and sheep are acceptable abatement practices. If you are unclear on the appropriate method to abate, contact the weed inspector at (707) 778-4389 for guidance.

Property owners who notice the existence of rare, threatened or endangered plants or wildlife on a noticed property must notify the Department of Fish and Game (or appropriate agency) at least ten (10) days in advance of undertaking the vegetation clearance. If the landowner is aware of any State or Federally-listed species on the property, then the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Fish and Game should be notified prior to the abatement. If a State or Federal candidate or listed species is killed, injured or captured, the landowner shall report this information to the Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, respectfully.

2. Safety Reminder

When mowing weeds, it is imperative it be done safely: One small spark from a mower blade hitting a rock can result in a big fire. All mowing should be done as early in the morning as possible, while temperatures are low, humidity is high, and grasses are still damp with dew.

When mowing always have a water press and pointed shovel handy. Mow early and often.