California Zone 0 and Western-State Wildfire Codes

What homeowners, HOAs, builders and property managers need to know

Research status: July 23, 2026

Important status note. California's detailed statewide Zone 0 regulations are still being finalized. February 2027 is not a universal statewide compliance deadline. Local jurisdictions may already enforce their own requirements, and final compliance must always be confirmed with the authority having jurisdiction.

Why the first five feet matter

Wildfires do not damage homes only through direct contact with a flame front. Wind-driven embers can travel ahead of a wildfire, collect against buildings and ignite dry leaves, mulch, wood fencing, furniture or vegetation. Once those materials ignite, they expose siding, windows, doors, vents, decks and eaves to sustained heat and flame.

Zone 0 is the area immediately surrounding a building—generally the first five feet from the exterior wall or certain attached features. It is commonly called the ember-resistant or immediate zone because reducing combustible material in this area can interrupt one of the most common pathways from an ember to a structure fire.

California's three defensible-space zones

Zone	Distance	Primary purpose
Zone 0	0–5 feet	Reduce the chance that embers or nearby combustible materials ignite the structure.
Zone 1	5–30 feet	Reduce flame intensity and interrupt continuous fuels near the building.
Zone 2	30–100 feet	Thin, space and maintain vegetation before a fire reaches the inner zones.

Source: California Public Resources Code §4291

Where California Zone 0 applies

The proposed statewide regulations cover:

- Buildings and structures located in a State Responsibility Area (SRA).

- Occupied structures located in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone within a Local Responsibility Area (LRA).

A property shown as Moderate or High on an LRA map is not automatically covered by the proposed statewide Zone 0 regulation unless the city, county or fire district has adopted broader local requirements. Properties in an SRA may be covered through Public Resources Code §4291 regardless of how the owner informally describes the fire-risk category.

Property owners should verify the current designation using official CAL FIRE and local maps and then review the applicable city, county and fire-district ordinances.

Current California timing

No universal February 2027 deadline. The City of San Diego tells existing owners to aim for Zone 0 guidelines by February 2027. That local target should not be represented as the final statewide deadline for every California property.

As of July 23, 2026, the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's July 2026 language remains draft regulation text. If adopted substantially as written, the timing would be:

Property or requirement	Proposed timing
New structure with initial permit application submitted after the regulations become effective	Full Zone 0 compliance upon the effective date.
Existing structure: dead branches, branches near chimneys and branches beneath eaves	Upon the effective date.
Existing structure: debris, mulch, firewood, roofs, gutters, under-deck areas and specified tree maintenance	Within three years.
Existing structure: immediate vegetation-free buffers, fencing, gates and small outbuildings	Within three years, or up to five years on a schedule established by the local fire agency.

Source: California Board of Forestry, July 2026 draft Zone 0 regulations

Source: City of San Diego defensible-space guidance

California requirements for single-family homes

Combustible materials and routine maintenance

Under the July 2026 draft, owners would generally be required to:

- Remove combustible bark mulch, wood chips, fallen leaves, needles and other combustible debris from Zone 0.
- Keep roofs and rain gutters clear of leaves, needles and combustible debris.

- Keep the areas beneath decks, balconies, stairs and pergolas free of vegetation and combustible items.
- Move firewood, lumber and stored wood out of Zone 0.
- Use noncombustible hardscape such as gravel, rock, pavers or concrete where appropriate.

Immediate vegetation-free safety areas

The draft creates stricter buffers around the most vulnerable parts of the building:

- No vegetation beneath eaves.
- At least one foot of vegetation-free space from a wall where no eave exists.
- A vegetation-free area from the wall to the outer edge of the eave, up to five feet.
- Two feet of vegetation-free space around windows, exterior doors, vents and posts.
- Five feet of vegetation-free space from attached combustible decks, stairs and pergolas.

Plants and landscaping

The current draft does not require every part of the five-foot zone to be completely barren. Outside the immediate safety buffers, it would allow limited, well-maintained non-woody vegetation, including:

- Lawns and ground covers maintained at no more than three inches high.
- Non-woody plants between three and eighteen inches high when placed in small, properly separated groupings.
- Plants no more than eighteen inches high in movable, noncombustible containers no larger than five gallons.

Dead or dying vegetation would not be allowed. Woody shrubs, hedges and vines generally present more difficulty than small, maintained herbaceous plants.

Trees

Existing trees would not automatically have to be removed, but they would require maintenance. The draft includes:

- Removal of dead and dying branches.
- At least ten feet of clearance from chimneys and stovepipe outlets.
- No live branches beneath eaves.
- Removal of ladder fuels from the lower six feet or lower one-third of the tree, whichever is less.
- Live branches generally maintained at least five feet above a roof.
- Inspector evaluation where a tree may transmit fire to the structure.

The draft would prohibit planting new trees inside Zone 0 after the regulations become effective.

Fences, gates and small outbuildings

- A combustible fence or gate could not attach directly to an occupied structure.
- A fence or gate attached to—or coming within one foot of—a structure would require a five-foot noncombustible span.
- No new combustible fence or gate would be permitted within five feet of a structure.
- Repairs to an existing combustible fence could use combustible replacement materials under the current draft.

- An outbuilding smaller than 120 square feet would not be permitted in Zone 0 unless constructed entirely of qualifying noncombustible materials.

What Zone 0 means for California HOAs

An HOA is not automatically exempt from defensible-space requirements. Responsibility generally follows ownership, control and the legal obligation to maintain the affected area.

Property component	Likely responsibility
Clubhouse or HOA-owned building	The association.
Common-area landscaping within five feet of a covered structure	The association.
Common fences, entry gates and perimeter improvements	The association, subject to the governing documents and local code.
Detached owner-occupied home and private lot	Normally the owner, unless the CC&Rs assign maintenance to the association.
Exclusive-use patio, balcony or yard	Depends on ownership and maintenance allocations in the governing documents.
Owner-installed landscaping in common area	Responsibility may be shared, but the association may still need to correct a common-area violation.

Recommended HOA preparation

1. Map the five-foot perimeter around every building, attached deck, stair, pergola and other covered feature.
2. Identify common area, exclusive-use common area and separately owned property.
3. Inventory wood fences, gates, mulch, shrubs, sheds, furniture and other combustible items.
4. Review CC&Rs and maintenance obligations with qualified California HOA counsel.
5. Adopt consistent landscaping and architectural standards that permit code-compliant materials.
6. Budget for common-area fence, gate, hardscape and landscape modifications.
7. Coordinate with the local fire authority before removing mature trees or committing to major replacements.

Other western states

California is not the only western state addressing wildfire-resistant construction and defensible space. The legal structure differs significantly, however. Colorado has the strongest current statewide minimum code comparable to California. Oregon supplies an optional model code. Most other western states rely primarily on local adoption.

State	Current position	0–5-foot regulation	Existing-home retrofit
California	State statute; detailed regulations still being finalized; local ordinances may already apply.	Yes.	State phase-in proposed; local rules vary.
Colorado	Adopted statewide minimum WUI code implemented locally.	Yes—Structure Ignition Zone 1.	Generally triggered by covered construction or alteration, not a blanket retrofit.
Oregon	Final state model code available for voluntary local adoption.	Yes, where adopted.	Only if the local ordinance applies it.
Washington	State WUI construction framework with significant local authority.	Potentially local.	Local.
Nevada	Primarily local WUI, fire-district and development requirements.	Potentially local.	Local.
Utah	Primarily local WUI, subdivision and fire-code requirements.	Potentially local.	Local.
Arizona	Primarily local WUI and fire-code requirements.	Potentially local.	Local.
Idaho	Primarily local codes, fire-district standards and subdivision conditions.	Potentially local.	Local.
Montana	Primarily local subdivision, WUI and fire-protection requirements.	Potentially local.	Local.
New Mexico	Emerging state wildfire-prepared standards; enforceable construction rules remain largely local.	Potentially local.	Local.
Wyoming	Primarily county and local WUI requirements.	Potentially local.	Local.

Colorado: the strongest current comparison

Colorado adopted the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code under Senate Bill 23-166. Covered local governments in mapped WUI areas were required to adopt codes meeting or exceeding the state minimum by April 1, 2026, with enforcement beginning by July 1, 2026. A 2026 proposal to extend the adoption deadline to April 2027 was postponed indefinitely and did not become law.

Colorado's code includes:

- Structure Ignition Zone 1 from zero to five feet.
- Noncombustible hard-surface treatment in the immediate zone.
- Noncombustible retaining walls and fencing within eight feet of a structure.
- Additional 5–30-foot and 30–100-foot fuel-management zones in higher-hazard classifications.
- Class 1 and Class 2 structure-hardening requirements based on mapped fire intensity.
- Local permitting, inspection and enforcement.

The Colorado code generally applies to new construction, relocated structures, additions and defined substantial repairs or alterations in mapped WUI areas. It does not automatically require every untouched existing home to complete a full retrofit.

Source: Colorado Senate Bill 23-166

Source: Colorado HB 26-1334 status—postponed indefinitely

Oregon: final model code, local adoption required

Oregon repealed its earlier mandatory statewide wildfire-map framework in 2025 and replaced it with a locally adoptable approach. The Oregon State Fire Marshal adopted the 2026 Oregon Defensible Space Model Code effective April 29, 2026.

The model becomes enforceable only after a local governmental subdivision completes its local adoption process. Oregon's official guidance emphasizes the first five feet and recommends rock, gravel or pavers, removal of bark mulch and flammable plants, clearing below decks and the use of metal gates for fence sections within five feet of a home.

Source: Oregon State Fire Marshal—Defensible Space

Source: Oregon Permanent Administrative Order OSFM 2-2026

Washington, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming

These states should not be described as having a uniform statewide California-equivalent Zone 0 retrofit mandate. Requirements may instead arise from city or county codes, fire-protection districts, subdivision approvals, development agreements, adopted portions of the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code, Community Wildfire Protection Plans or HOA standards.

For projects in these states, the controlling documents must be reviewed at the jurisdiction and project level. A general state wildfire-preparedness recommendation is not necessarily an enforceable building-code requirement.

What this means for fencing and gate selection

Wildfire codes increasingly focus on combustible fences and gates because a fence can carry flame directly to a home. All-aluminum systems can provide a strong alternative to wood and other combustible fence materials, but compliance depends on the complete product assembly and the adopted code.

Product condition	Compliance consideration
All-aluminum ornamental fence or gate	Strong candidate for a noncombustible fence application, subject to complete assembly review and local approval.
Aluminum system with wood, plastic, composite or foam-filled components	Must not automatically be represented as noncombustible solely because the exterior skin or frame is aluminum. PrimeAlux Aluminum Slat Fencing received a Class A E84 Fire Rating.
Powder-coated aluminum	The metal substrate is noncombustible, but final acceptance depends on the complete assembly, finish and applicable code definition.

Product condition	Compliance consideration
Product installed near an occupied structure	Confirm required separation, transition length, attachment details and permit requirements with the authority having jurisdiction.

Planning checklist for owners, HOAs and project teams

8. Confirm whether the property is in an SRA, LRA, mapped WUI or locally designated wildfire-hazard area.
9. Identify the city, county, fire district and building department with enforcement authority.
10. Obtain the currently adopted code—not only state guidance or a proposed regulation.
11. Measure from the correct point, including attached decks, stairs, pergolas and other regulated projections.
12. Inventory combustible landscaping, fencing, gates, sheds and stored contents.
13. Determine who owns and maintains each affected component.
14. Confirm whether the project triggers new-construction, addition, alteration or retrofit requirements.
15. Request written product acceptance or permit guidance before purchasing or specifying major quantities.
16. Build ongoing inspection and maintenance into HOA and property-management procedures.

Key takeaway

California and Colorado are establishing the clearest enforceable western requirements for the area immediately surrounding buildings. Oregon now provides a five-foot-focused model that local governments may adopt. Elsewhere in the West, requirements remain primarily local.

For homeowners and HOAs, the practical direction is consistent: reduce combustible material closest to buildings, interrupt combustible fencing before it reaches the structure and coordinate early with the local fire and building authorities.

Complete references used

- California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection—Defensible Space Zones 0, 1 and 2
- California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection—July 2026 Draft Zone 0 Summary and Rule Text
- California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection—July 2026 Zone 0 Technical Clarification Memorandum
- California Public Resources Code §4291
- CAL FIRE—Defensible Space
- CAL FIRE—Home Hardening
- California Office of the State Fire Marshal—WUI Listed Products and Building Materials Listing
- City of San Diego—Guide to Defensible Space

- Colorado Senate Bill 23-166
- Colorado General Assembly—Session Law for Senate Bill 23-166
- Colorado General Assembly—HB 26-1334 Status, Postponed Indefinitely
- City and County of Broomfield—2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Overview and Documents
- Town of Superior—Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Applicability
- Town of Lyons—Wildfire Resiliency Code Fence Requirements
- Oregon Senate Bill 83—2025 Legislative Measure Summary
- Oregon State Fire Marshal—Defensible Space
- Oregon Permanent Administrative Order OSFM 2-2026
- Washington State Register—2026 Wildland-Urban Interface Code Amendments
- Washington Department of Natural Resources—Defensible Space
- New Mexico State Forestry Division—2025 Communities at Risk Assessment Plan
- International Code Council—2024 International Wildland-Urban Interface Code

Publication disclaimer

This article is provided for general educational and product-planning purposes and is not legal, engineering, code-compliance or insurance advice. Wildfire regulations, maps and enforcement practices are changing rapidly. Property owners, associations, designers, contractors and specifiers must confirm the currently adopted requirements with qualified professionals and the authority having jurisdiction before relying on this information.