



**Fire Safe Council of Nevada County**  
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## **Talking to Your Neighbors about Defensible Space**

Wildfire is the number one natural hazard threat in Nevada County. There are numerous ways the community may take action to protect themselves from wildfire. Individual property defensible space may be ineffective if surrounding properties do not also engage in fuels mitigation treatments. The fire will not stop just because it reaches a property boundary.

### **If you are only dealing with one or two neighbors:**

1. Approach your neighbor in a friendly manner with the goal to educate them and open the dialogue about the fire danger in your area and the benefits of making their property more fire safe. Make an earnest expression of your concerns as they relate to your property.
2. Provide them with written information on the high fire danger in your neighborhood and what action steps can be taken to mitigate this danger. Let them know the importance of working across property lines to reduce the fire hazard. The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County can provide you with this information to share with your neighbor at no cost.
3. Give them information on local resources to help with the problem such as: Defensible Space Advisory Visits; The Chipping Program; The Special Needs Assistance Program; The Senior Wood Care Program; the EQIP program. The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County can provide you this information to share with your neighbor.
4. Gauge their response. If you sense resistance or hostility don't push the issue. Leave the information with them and let it go for now. Follow up with them in a week or two and see if they have had a chance to read the material and what their opinion is on it.
5. If you are able and willing, ask if you may assist them with the area you are concerned with. Focus on areas that are within 100' of a structure or are affecting evacuation routes. If your neighbor agrees to allow you to assist them in resolving the problem, put in writing what the scope of work will be, who assumes the liability and who pays what costs, if any.

### **If you are dealing with several neighbors or your whole community:**

1. Consider hosting a Defensible Space Advisory visit "party" at your house. As the host you would invite your neighbors to learn about the concept of defensible space using your house as the example. A trained volunteer would conduct a Defensible Space Advisory visit of your property during the party and answer questions that you or your guests might have. This has been a very powerful mechanism to gain support in communities as well as incite action as a whole with neighbors helping neighbors to improve the fire safe condition throughout the neighborhood.
2. If you live in a Homeowners Association, Neighborhood Association or Road Association consider having someone from the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County speak at your next

meeting on the high fire danger and steps that your community can take to help mitigate the hazard. If your community is motivated to work towards being more fire safe they can also talk about how your neighborhood can become a certified Firewise Community/USA®.

**If you are dealing with a neighbor who has not complied with the Defensible Space Law:** State law (under Public Resource Code 4291) only requires defensible space to be maintained within 100 feet of a structure or to the property line. It doesn't cover vacant parcels or vegetation that is out of the 100 feet zone for the neighboring properties structure but may still be within 100' of your structure. These areas may be covered by a local ordinance. You may request assistance from your local fire agency (for vacant properties) or CAL FIRE (property with a structure.) They will inspect the entire neighborhood not just the neighbor's property during their visit.

If you have tried talking to your neighbor and they don't understand or have become hostile about the issue you might have other options.

1. Check with your local fire district for vacant properties for enforcement under the Nevada County Vegetation Management ordinance.
2. If you have a Homeowner Association, Neighborhood Association or Road Association, they may have existing ordinances for weed abatement problems that may help to address the problem (Lake of the Pines and Lake Wildwood both have weed abatement ordinances.)
3. If you live in a Firewise Community they may be able to send a letter to the individual asking the homeowner to address the problem and the repercussions and benefits of complying.
4. If you have tried all other avenues, as a **last resort** you may send a certified letter to the property owner stating the fire hazard. Provide details and photos of the hazard from your own property and state that if a fire originates on their property and spreads to yours because of the hazard you will seek legal action. Unfortunately, the threat of legal proceedings may be the only communication that makes them take action.

For more information please contact the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County at 530-272-1122 or visit our website at [www.areyoufiresafe.com](http://www.areyoufiresafe.com).