

Firebreak...a strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire



Firebreak, photo courtesy USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Purposes

The purpose of this practice is to protect soil, water, air, plant, animal, and human resources by preventing the spread of wildfire or controlling prescribed burns.

Benefits

Firebreaks can protect crops, pastureland, forests, wildlife habitat or manmade structures from wildfires or prescribed burns. In addition, when properly managed, firebreaks can also prevent soil erosion and protect nearby water quality from sediment runoff.

Applications

This practice applies on all land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied. This may be cropland, pastureland, woodland, wildlife land or around farm buildings or other structures.

Design and Installation

Firebreaks can consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination of the above. They may be temporary or permanent, depending on the desired purpose.

The location and width of the firebreak are determined by evaluating the flammable material to be controlled or protected, but minimum width will be 15 feet or 3 times the height of combustible material, whichever is greater.

When possible, constructed firebreaks should tie into existing natural barriers including streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-ways, and cultivated land that will stop the movement of fire.

Maintenance

On any type of firebreak, it is important to avoid a build-up of combustible material. On vegetated firebreaks, mowing is a helpful method for removing excess plant material. Bare ground firebreaks should be inspected at least annually and reworked as necessary to prevent the buildup of flammable material.

If firebreaks are used to control a prescribed burn, be sure to follow a prescribed burn plan and to remove all grass clippings and combustible material such as dead limbs and blown down trees from firebreaks before burning.

In addition, erosion control and weed control measures may be needed depending on the type of firebreak installed and the practice's desired purpose. When installed, these measures should be inspected regularly to ensure adequate function.

Relative Cost

Installation low ● ○ ○ ○ ○ high

Maintenance low ● ○ ○ ○ ○ high

For Additional Information...

Visit the Indiana NRCS office online at <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/>, see the Indiana Job Sheet or the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) standard for (394) Firebreak, or contact your local USDA-NRCS office

Local USDA-NRCS contact information