

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**FIREBREAK**

(Feet)

CODE 394

**DEFINITION**

A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire.

such as corn or soybeans where residue is left undisturbed; legumes such as alfalfa; tilled ground; other vegetation or cover that will slow down wildfires; or a combination of these.

**PURPOSES**

- To prevent the spread of wildfire.
- To control prescribed burns.

- Species/vegetation selection will be selected based on their attributes in slowing down retarding wildfire and ease of maintenance. The timing and height of haying/shredding operations must be compatible with vegetation in order to maintain the health and vigor of the stand (refer to Forage Harvest Management 511 for guidance).

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

All land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

Wildfire Control (complete control in case of wildfire):

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes**

**Materials**

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and shall consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination of these.

- Firebreaks must consist of tilled (bare) ground; low residue crops (i.e. soybeans, edible beans, sunflowers, etc.) high residue crops (i.e. corn, milo, wheat) that are tilled or residue removed after harvest; or legumes such as alfalfa that are hayed frequently, or other types of firebreaks that are free of burnable material.

Where appropriate existing roads or other existing areas may be used as a substitute where they provide for the desired fire suppression or fire control.

**Dimensions**

Firebreaks will be of sufficient width and length to contain the fire. The width for any firebreak shall never be less than 20 feet wide. Width and length must always equal or exceed local fire district requirements. Longer stretches of continuous fuels will require wider firebreaks to suppress or control wildfires because of the extra energy released.

Fire suppression only (allows greater response time for fire department and/or increases likelihood of wildfire control):

Stretches of continuous fuel less than 1000 feet adjacent to low risk areas (tilled cropland, growing crops, or low fuel load areas):

- Examples of firebreaks used to slow and suppress wildfire include: hayed strips; vegetation that is shredded, mowed, or raked; low growing grasses i.e. bluegrass, buffalograss, sideoats grama, etc.; cool season grasses that have green growth during the highest risk of fire; annual crops

- The minimum width of a firebreak will be 5

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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times the height of the vegetation.

Stretches of continuous fuel greater than 1000 feet adjacent to low risk areas (tilled cropland, growing crops, or low fuel load areas):

- The minimum width of a firebreak will be 10 times the height of the vegetation.

Stretches of continuous fuel less than 1000 feet adjacent to high risk areas (personal property such as; dwellings, outbuildings, windbreaks, etc., and areas with a high fuel load):

- The minimum width of a firebreak will be 10 times the height of the vegetation.

Stretches of continuous fuel greater than 1000 feet adjacent to high risk areas (personal property such as; dwellings, outbuildings, windbreaks, etc., and areas with a high fuel load):

- The minimum width will be 100 feet, unless 10 times the height of vegetation is greater.

#### **Location**

Firebreaks shall be located on the outside perimeter of the fire hazard area, and next to the area being protected in order to minimize risk to the resources being protected.

Firebreaks shall be located to minimize risk to the resources being protected. When practical firebreaks will be located on the contour to minimize risk of soil erosion.

#### **Other criteria**

Erosion control measures shall prevent sediment from leaving the site.

All local laws and regulations will be complied with including any requirements of local fire districts.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Use barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, field borders, skidtrails, landings, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-ways, cultivated land, or other areas as existing firebreaks.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms. If winds are predictable, firebreaks should be located perpendicular to the

wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

Consider the selection of plant species that will enhance the needs of wildlife in the area.

Design and layout should include multiple uses.

Consider cultural resources and environmental concerns such as threatened and endangered species of plants and animals, natural areas, and wetlands.

Consider planting wildlife foodplots as firebreaks when wildlife management objectives are being considered.

Consider the timing and re-growth needed to maintain long-term health and vigor of herbaceous vegetation when shredding/mowing/haying vegetation.

Consider the use of prescribed burns to minimize the potential of wildfire.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using narrative statements in the conservation plan or included as part of a prescribed burn plan with the location documented on the conservation plan map.

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Mow or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds.

Inspect all firebreaks for woody materials such as dead limbs or blown down trees and remove them from the firebreak.

Inspect firebreaks annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them clear of flammable vegetation.

Repair erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Access by vehicles or people will be controlled to prevent damage to the firebreak.

Bare ground firebreaks, which are no longer needed, will be stabilized by permanent vegetation.