

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**FUEL BREAK**

(Ac.)

**CODE 383**

**DEFINITION**

A strip or block of land on which the vegetation, debris and detritus have been reduced and/or modified to control or diminish the risk of the spread of fire crossing the strip or block of land.

**PURPOSE**

Control and reduce the risk of the spread of fire by treating, removing or modifying vegetation, debris and detritus.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on all land where protection from wildfire is needed.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes**

Fuel breaks strips or blocks will be of sufficient width and length to meet the intended purposes.

Fuel breaks around buildings and other areas to be protected will consist of three zones.

Zone 1 will be a minimum of 30 feet wide and will be maintained in green, short vegetation such as grasses and forbs. The area 3 to 5 feet around buildings should be kept free of anything that can burn (no plantings, no mulch). Fallen leaves, needles and other debris should be routinely removed. Establish fire-resistant vegetation to further decrease the risk of the spread of fire. Fire wood and other combustible items will be located outside of zone 1. Prune trees to 12 feet or 1/3 the total height from the ground, depending on the size

of the tree, and prune/remove all branches within 15 feet of buildings. See Practice Standard 660-Tree/Shrub Pruning. Space trees 30 feet apart and limit conifers in this zone. Remove all dead vegetation within zone 1. Power lines will be free of hazards such as overhanging tree branches and/or nearby dead and dying trees.

Zone 2 is 30 to 100 feet from the area to be protected. Groups of trees in zone 2 will be at least 30 feet apart and single trees (stems) will be at least 20 feet apart. Maintain vertical separation between fuel layers to remove "ladder" fuels, i.e., lowest layers of flammable vegetation do not connect to upper layers so that a fire cannot "step up" to higher canopies.

Zone 3 is 100 to 200 feet from the area to be protected. Thin the over story so that canopies do not touch. Treat or remove slash sufficiently and at a time to minimize fuel loadings to acceptable fire risk levels and reduce incidence of harmful insects and disease. See Practice Standard 384-Woody Residue Treatment.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Attempt to locate fuel breaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms. If winds are predictable, fuel breaks can be located perpendicular to the wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

Slash produced in the establishment of a fuel break that is not removed from the site will be treated or arranged to enhance wildlife habitat.

Select plant species that will enhance the

needs of desired wildlife in the area.

Design and layout should include enhancement of multiple uses.

Consider beneficial and other effects of installation of the fuel break on cultural resources and threatened and endangered species, natural areas, and wetlands.

#### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using job sheet 138, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, burn plan, or other acceptable documentation.

#### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Treat vegetative fuel breaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control noxious and invasive plants.

Inspect all fuel breaks for woody materials such as dead limbs or blown down trees and remove or treat as necessary to maintain the desired level of fire spread risk.

Inspect fuel breaks at frequencies to assure that the desired level of fire spread risk is maintained.

Maintain the functionality of the original design throughout the life of the practice.