

Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA – FIRE DEPARTMENT ✦ February 2026

Message from the Chief and Fire Marshal:

Thank you for your continued partnership in the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District (WFSAD). The WFSAD was created to provide dedicated funding and tailored fire mitigation services in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill high fire hazard areas of Santa Barbara — areas with a history of wildland fire due to our Mediterranean climate, steep terrain, and historic vegetation patterns.

What makes this district truly special is the steady, long-term investment it represents. Since its establishment in 2006, and with annual City Council support, the WFSAD has funded defensible space chipping, vegetation road clearance, voluntary property evaluations, and community fuels treatments — all guided by the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The CWPP provides the scientific and strategic foundation for prioritizing projects and measuring progress in reducing wildfire risk throughout the City.

As we reflect one year after the Palisades and Eaton Fires, our hearts remain with our neighbors in Los Angeles County. Unfortunately, our community understands these fire threats firsthand, and the lessons underscore the importance of proactive defensible space, home hardening, and community preparedness.

In response to evolving wildfire behavior, new standards through research are helping us stay ahead of risk. Zone 0 regulations emphasize an ember-resistant area within the first five feet of structures by reducing ignitable materials closest to homes. Additional education and guidance will be provided throughout the year about these new regulations.

At the heart of this district's success is community. Neighbor-to-neighbor cooperation, shared responsibility, and everyday due diligence remain our strongest defenses against wildfire. This year also saw a significant increase in Firewise communities, supported by the Fire Safe Council — clear evidence that small, consistent actions add up. It truly takes a village, and every cleared yard, shared conversation, and preparedness effort helps protect the place we call home.

We are thrilled to announce a new addition to our team — Alex Vand, our Wildland Fire Services Specialist. We are incredibly lucky to have Alex on board, bringing her expertise in geographic information systems (GIS), environmental data science, and community engagement to support CWPP-based planning and neighborhood wildfire preparedness. Join me in giving her a warm welcome!



In this newsletter you can expect:

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- 8-9. Wildfire Resiliency Project & Grazing
10. Be Prepared & Firewise
11. New Wildland Fire Services Specialist

Thank you for prioritizing community wildfire resilience.

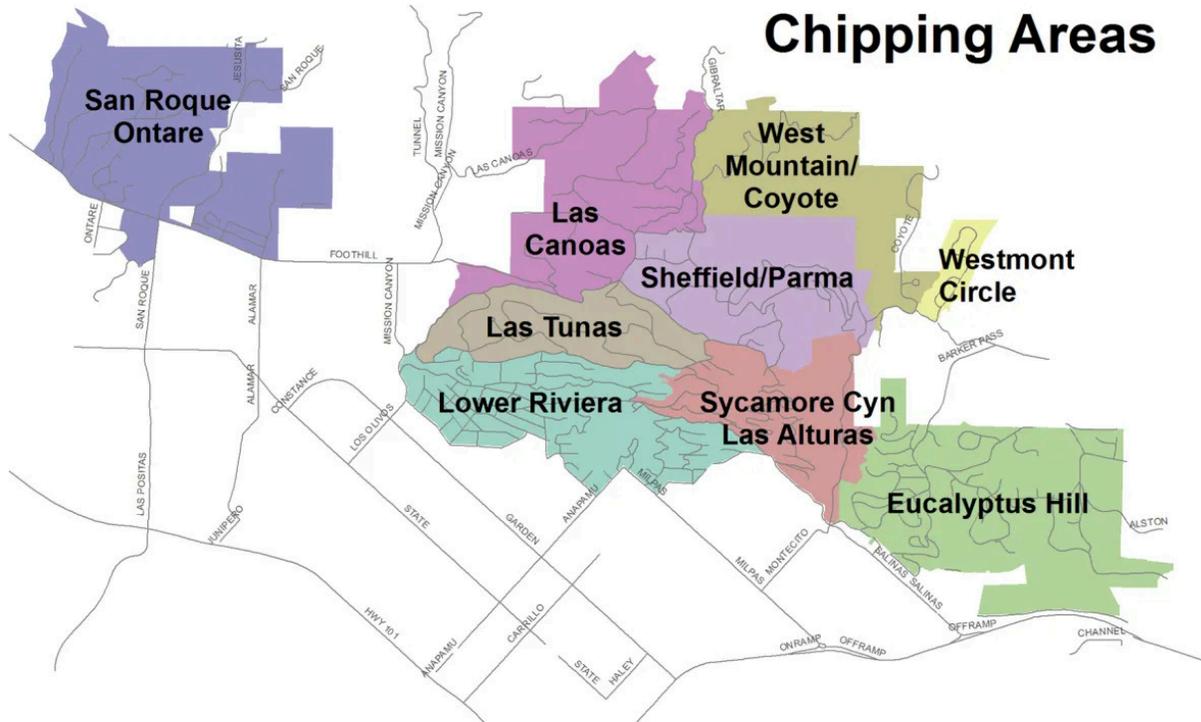
With appreciation and optimism,

Ryan DiGiulio, Fire Marshal

Chris Mailes, Fire Chief

DEFENSIBLE SPACE CHIPPING MAP

Please put your cut vegetation out on roadways no sooner than two weeks and no later than 7am the morning your chipping area is scheduled to begin (second passes will not be made).



Chipping Schedule

TENTATIVE – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Sheffield/Parma.....	March 23 rd
Las Canoas.....	April 6 th
Eucalyptus Hill.....	April 20 th
Sycamore Canyon/Las Alturas.....	May 4 th
Lower Riviera.....	May 11 th
San Roque/Ontare.....	May 26 th
Las Tunas.....	June 8 th
Circle/Westmont.....	June 15 th
West Mountain/Coyote.....	June 22 nd

Exotic pest plants that will NOT be chipped include:

- Arundo
- Castor bean
- Fennel
- Tamarisk
- Tobacco weed
- All species of ivy
- All species of broom
- Any type of grass
- Any type of bamboo



Chipping services help property owners create defensible space by providing free disposal of cut vegetation. The chipping instructions below outline the specific requirements:

- Cut vegetation must be stacked by the first day of the chipping schedule in your area.
- Cut vegetation should be laid out in a pile along the street outside the drivable road.
- The cut end of all vegetation must face the street so we can easily handle the material.
- Brush should be left in long lengths (4-7 feet). This makes it much easier to chip.
- Cut branches should be no greater than 10 inches in diameter.
- Long piles are ok as long as they are not over 4 feet in height.
- Piles pushed or moved by mechanical means, i.e. tractor, will not be chipped.
- Material in plastic bags is not accepted.
- Twine or string must not be used to tie vegetation.
- Rocks or other debris will not be chipped.
- Old dead vegetation that has been lying around for years will not be chipped (this type of vegetation damages chipper blades).
- Pine needles or other leaf litter cannot be chipped.
- Grasses, palm fronds, succulents or agaves will not be chipped.

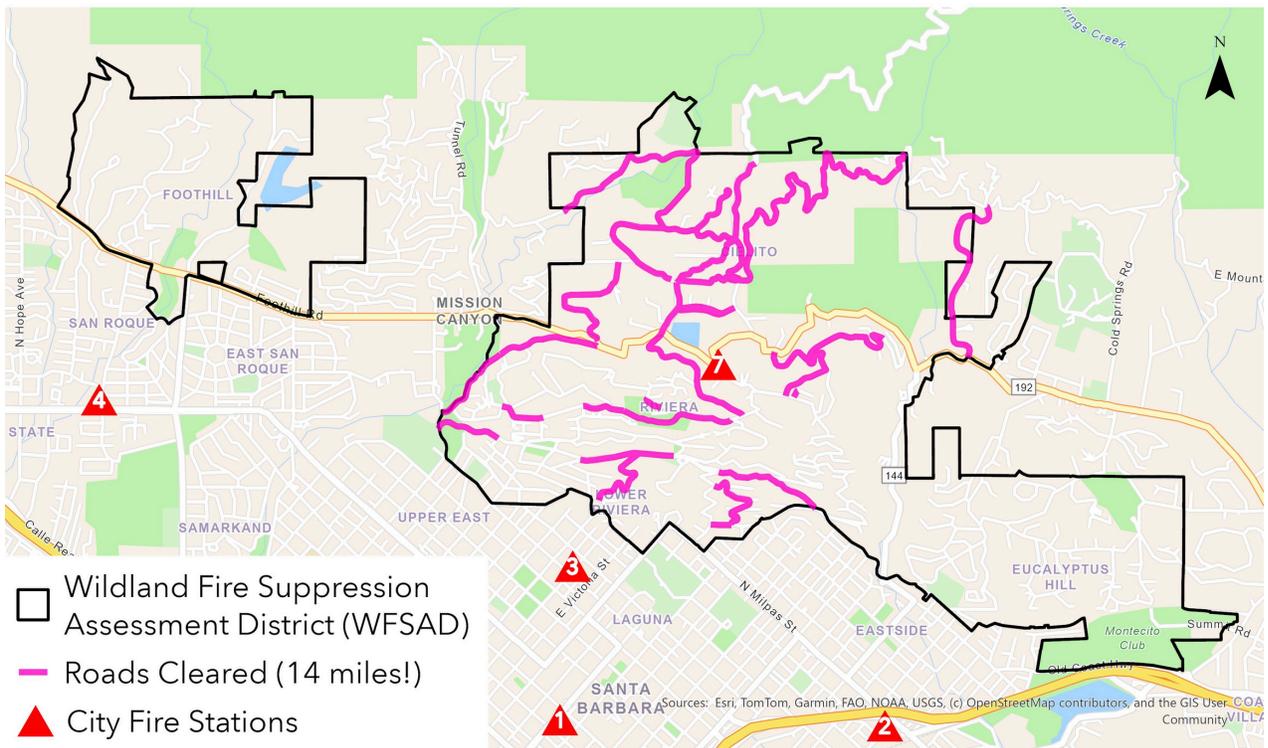


ROADSIDE CLEARANCE

Each year the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department clears approximately 14 miles of vegetation along roadways within the WFSAD. Flammable vegetation along roadways creates hazardous conditions, especially during an evacuation. Burning vegetation along roads can force the closure of important evacuation routes, impedes the ingress of first responders and the egress of residents evacuating from areas. It is critical all property owners in the High Fire Hazard Area Zones maintain vegetation bordering roadways on their property year round.



MAP OF PROGRESS – COMPLETED ROADS



DEFENSIBLE SPACE & HOME HARDENING

What is Defensible Space?

Defensible Space is the landscaped area around your home maintained to reduce the fire danger to structures and your property. A good defensible space area is key in providing a buffer between an approaching wildfire. It can make the difference between saving or losing your home.



What is involved in a Defensible Space and Home Hardening evaluation?

During a free, voluntary, and penalty-free Defensible Space & Home Hardening Evaluation, we meet you on site and walk around your property. We review existing landscaping and exterior building features, highlight what is already working well, and offer educational recommendations and suggestions for additional improvements that may further increase the survivability of your home. The goal of the evaluation is not enforcement, but to provide guidance and support to help you make informed decisions.

Please sign up for a **FREE** Defensible Space and Home Hardening evaluation!



DEFENSIBLE SPACE SUGGESTIONS:

Just snap the above QR code with your smartphone and it will take you to our sign up form. You will be contacted to set up an appointment within 1-2 business days. You can also visit: SantaBarbaraCA.gov/WFSAD

- Reduce Fire Ladders: Separate and space your plants both horizontally and vertically.
- Reduce Ignition Sources: Embers may blow miles ahead of the fire. Frequently check and remove leaves and debris from roofs and gutters. Check under decks and porches, deck furniture, play/storage structures, doormats, and potted plants.
- Trees: Remove branches from the ground a minimum of 6 feet or 1/3 the total height of the tree. Remove all dead branches.
- Brush: Remove dead fuel and limb up 2 feet from the ground. Keep separation between shrubs, brush and trees.
- Grass: Mow to 4 inches from the ground.
- Debris Piles: Do not pile wood chips or mulch on your property. Spread and maintain them no greater than a 4 to 4 inch depth. Compost should be kept in an appropriate container.
- Ornamental Plants: Should be irrigated, maintained and pruned year-round.

Santa Barbara City High Fire Hazard Area Defensible Space Requirements

Extreme Foothill Zone: 150 feet
Foothill Zone: 100 feet
Coastal Zone: 50 to 70 feet
Coastal Interior Zone: 30 to 50 feet

Not sure which zone you are in?
Contact the Santa Barbara City
Fire Department at (805) 965-5254.



Zone Zero: 0'–5'

0

This area starts at your roof and extends 5 feet from walls. Embers are your home's biggest threat!

Remove all combustible materials and protect vents and openings where wind-blown embers can enter.

1. Use only inorganic, non-combustible mulches such as stone or gravel.
2. Remove combustible outdoor furniture. Replace with metal or non-combustible varieties.
3. Replace jute or natural fiber doormats with heavy rubber or metal grates.
4. Remove or relocate all combustible materials including garbage and recycling containers, lumber, trash and patio accessories.
5. Clean all fallen leaves and needles.
6. No vegetation is recommended within 5' of any structure.
7. Remove tree limbs that extend into this zone. Fire prone tree varieties should be removed if they extend into this zone.
8. Do not store firewood, lumber or combustibles here, even (especially) under decks or overhangs. Move stored combustibles inside or at least 30' from any structure.
9. Hardscaping is strongly recommended around the base of structures.

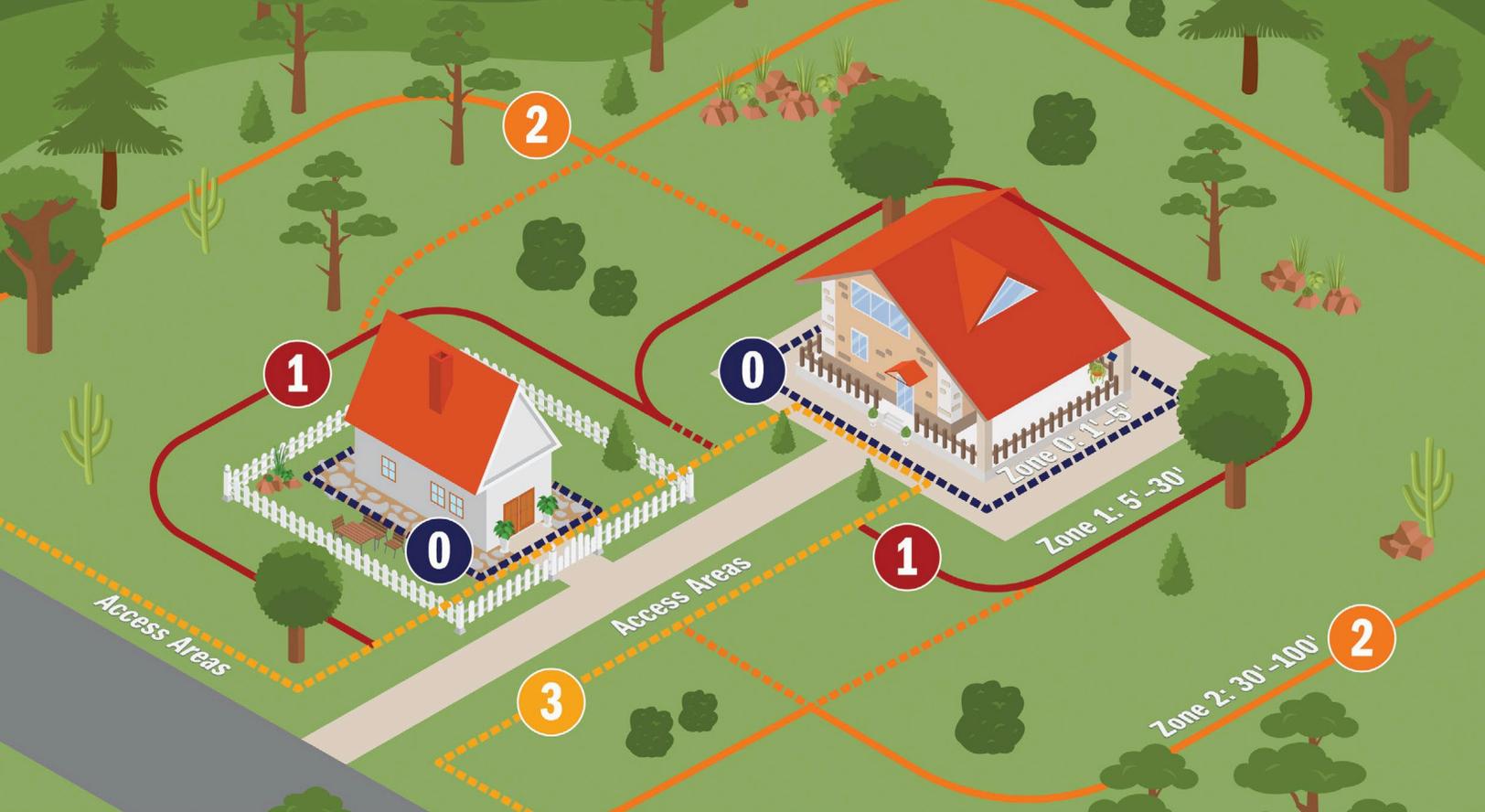
Zone 1: 5'–30'

1

Zone 1 extends 30 feet out from buildings, decks and other structures.

Keep this area "Lean, Clean and Green," and be sure to maintain regularly throughout fire season!

1. Remove all dead grasses, weeds, plants and foliage.
2. Remove fire-prone plant varieties.
3. Remove all fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones and branches.
4. Remove "Gorilla Hair" or shredded bark mulch. Use only compost or heavy bark mulch to maintain soil moisture, or for erosion control.
5. Choose only fire resistant plants, and keep them healthy and well irrigated.
6. Provide spacing between shrubs, and add space on steeper slopes.
7. Remove limbs 6' to 10' from the ground.
8. Remove branches that overhang your roof or within 10' of chimneys.
9. Move firewood and lumber out of Zone 1.
10. Remove combustibles around and under decks and awnings.
11. Clear vegetation around fences, sheds, outdoor furniture and play structures.
12. Outbuildings and LPG tanks should have at least 10' of clearance.



Zone 2: 30'–100'

2

Zone 2 is the space extending 30 to 100 feet from buildings, decks and other structures.

Reduce fuel for fire and separate trees and shrubs in the area. Remove dead vegetation regularly.

1. Cut annual grasses and weeds to a maximum height of 4".
2. Create horizontal spacing between shrubs and trees.
3. Create vertical spacing between grass, shrubs and lower tree limbs.
4. Allow no more than 3" of loose surface litter (consisting of fallen leaves, needles, twigs, cones and small branches), if needed, to protect from erosion.
5. Remove all piles of dead vegetation.

Work With Your Neighbors

Many homes do not have 100' of space between structures and parcel lines. Property owners are required to maintain defensible space only to their property line.

Work with neighbors to help provide defensible space for their homes, and ask neighbors for help if their property threatens yours. In most cases, the most effective solution is a cooperative approach between neighbors.

Access Areas

3

Property owners are responsible for vegetation adjacent to roads and driveways.

Access roads are critical for evacuation and first responder access. Maintenance is required year-round.

1. Clear vegetation 13.5' overhead and 10' from sides of roads and driveways in the same manner as Defensible Space Zone 1.
2. Maintain 12' of unobstructed pavement for passage of vehicles.
3. Within this area, choose only fire resistant plant varieties and ensure that they do not extend into the roadway.
4. 13.5' of clearance is required above the roadway for emergency vehicle access.
5. Address numbers must be clearly visible from the road, with at least 4" numbers on a contrasting background. Reflective or lighted numbers are best.
6. Create vertical spacing between shrubs and lower tree limbs.

Public Right of Way

Many property owners mistakenly believe that they are not responsible for roadside vegetation fronting their property. Property owners are responsible for vegetation adjacent to roads and driveways, even in the public right of way. Ensure that vegetation is maintained on all sides of your property.



Wildfire Resiliency Project – Stevens Park



The City's Wildfire Resiliency Project is a proactive fire prevention effort led by Parks & Recreation in collaboration with the Fire Department. The project takes place across open space parks located in high fire hazard areas, with this season's work focused in Stevens Park. With grant funding through CAL FIRE, approximately three acres of high-fire-risk eucalyptus and acacia were removed to create defensible space and reduce excess fire fuel within the highly fire-susceptible Jesusita Corridor. The project also included repairs to the primary San Roque access trail, improving safety and usability for emergency responders and park visitors.





Wildfire Resiliency Project – Zoo Collaboration



In a creative and sustainable twist, plant material removed from Stevens Park found new life at the Santa Barbara Zoo. Trimmings from invasive olive and acacia trees were used to feed and enrich animals such as giraffes, kangaroos, wallabies, monkeys, and porcupines, while branches were repurposed to give birds like toucans and cockatoos new opportunities to climb, explore, and play. This exciting partnership turned wildfire fuel reduction into animal enrichment—showcasing how our wildfire resilience work can protect the community while delivering unexpected and memorable benefits.

Grazing – Sheep Are Coming Back!

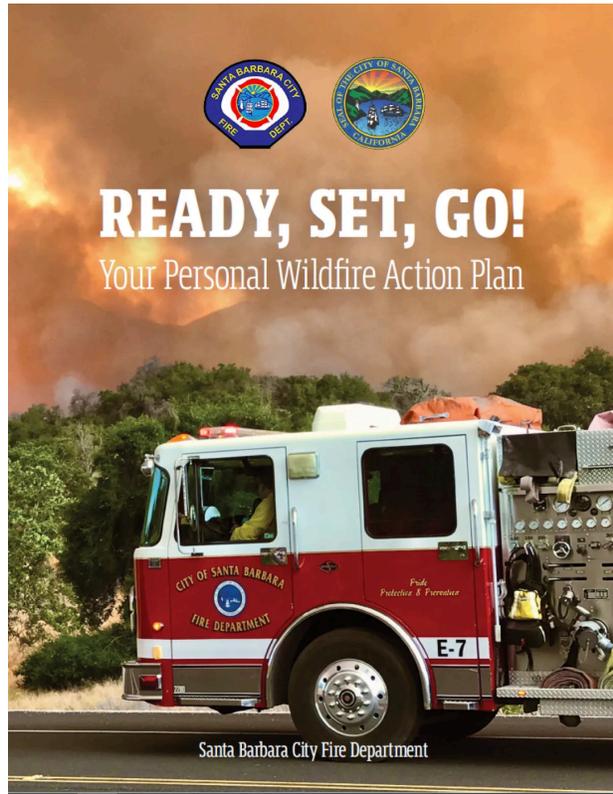
We're excited to announce that targeted sheep grazing will return this spring to help reduce wildfire fuels and keep our parks safer ahead of fire season. The herd will be working through Franceschi Park, Parma Park, Hale Park, and Laurel Canyon Park, eating down grasses and brush that can become wildfire fuel — a natural, proven tool to support fire mitigation and defensible space. Thanks to the significant rainfall this year, grasses are growing quickly, so we may even plan for two grazing passes to keep vegetation in check. Beyond wildfire preparedness, grazing also supports healthier landscapes by managing invasive grasses, improving soil health, and promoting more resilient native plant communities.



Be Prepared – Ready, Set, Go!

Ready, Set, Go! is a wildfire preparedness program designed to help residents take clear, practical steps before a fire occurs. “Ready” focuses on defensible space and home hardening, “Set” emphasizes situational awareness and evacuation planning, and “Go” encourages early evacuation when fire threatens.

Residents are encouraged to review the local Ready, Set, Go! guide and complete a Personal Wildfire Action Plan. Please reach out for support! Preparing ahead of time helps protect lives, homes, and first responders during wildfire emergencies.



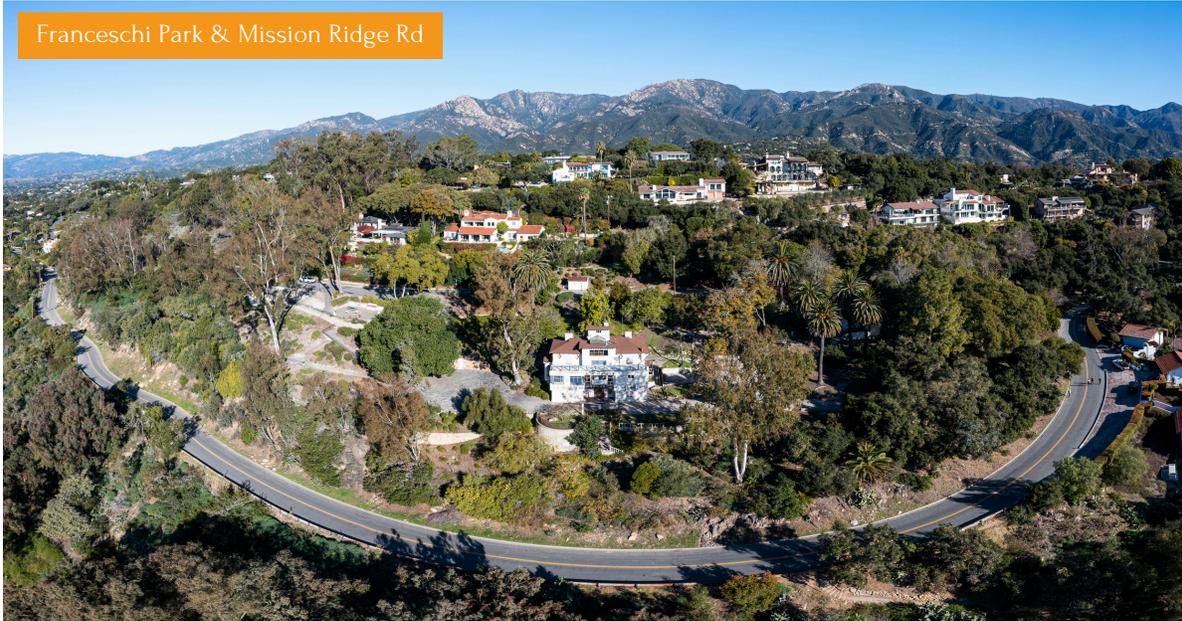
Fire Safe Council and Firewise Communities

Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council is a local, community-driven organization that works to make neighborhoods less vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire through education, coordinated projects, and community engagement. It partners with residents, fire agencies, and local groups to support wildfire risk reduction across our region. Firewise Communities are part of a national recognition program that helps neighbors organize and take collective action to reduce wildfire risk where they live. This framework invites community members to assess risks, create multi-year action plans, and work together on mitigation activities that protect homes and shared spaces.

Firewise designation also often increases access to technical resources, potential insurance benefits, and strengthened local resilience.

In our City, we currently have 23 recognized Firewise Communities, and within the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District (WFSAD) specifically 14. These designations reflect neighbors working together to reduce wildfire risk, create safer evacuation routes, and protect properties through collaborative planning and action — something that builds local strength and reduces risk for everyone.





HI NEIGHBORS – I’M HERE TO HELP!

I’m excited and honored to join your community as the Fire Services Specialist for the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District (WFSAD).

I was trained here in Santa Barbara — earning a Bachelor of Science in Physical Geography (ocean, atmospheric, and fire science) from UCSB and a Master of Environmental Data Science from the Bren School also at UCSB — and I bring local training and perspective to understanding wildfire behavior and prevention.

Together, we live in a place with a long, rich fire history, and I’m here to support you with practical wildfire awareness, mapping tools, and defensible space guidance that help keep homes, neighborhoods, and wildlands safer. Creating and maintaining defensible space — the cleared buffer around your home that slows fire spread — and thoughtful home hardening are proven ways to protect lives and property.

I’m happy to talk about upcoming projects, answer questions, or come to your property for a free defensible space & home hardening evaluation. If you notice street trees that need trimming to improve evacuation routes or other fire safety concerns, please let me know — I’m here to help.

Please call, text, or email anytime — I’m grateful to be here, proud to serve, and ready to work with you to make our community more resilient.

When I’m not in my navy uniform, you might find me kayaking, scuba diving, practicing yoga, playing tennis, or exploring local trails and farmers’ markets — always enjoying the outdoors and meeting neighbors like you.

Alex Vand
Fire Services Specialist

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 Fire Department
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Please sign up for a **FREE** Defensible Space & Home Hardening Evaluation!

Santa Barbara County Fire History

Year	Fire Name	Acres	Homes Lost
1955	Refugio	84,770	Several
1964	Coyote	67,000	100+
1971	Romero	14,538	4
1977	Sycamore	805	234
1977	Honda	10,000	0
1979	Eagle	4,530	5
1990	Painted Cave	4,900	524
1993	Marre	43,864	0
2002	Sudden	7,160	0
2004	Gaviota	7,440	1
2007	Zaca	240,207	0
2008	Gap	9,445	0
2008	Tea	1,940	238
2009	Jesusita	8,733	80
2016	Sherpa	7,474	0
2016	Rey	32,606	0
2016	Canyon	12,518	0
2017	Alamo	28,687	1
2017	Whittier	18,430	16
2017	Thomas	281,893	1,063
2019	Holiday	113	24
2019	Cave	3,126	0
2021	Loma	7	0
2021	Alisal	16,970	12



WFSAD funding provides for:

- Vegetation Chipping
- Vegetation Road Clearance
- Vegetation Management Projects
- Defensible Space & Home Hardening Evaluations
- Public Education & Outreach

SantaBarbaraCA.gov/WFSAD