



Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District

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Fire Chief
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2026

Dear Community Members of the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District (RSFFPD),

Over nine hundred wildland fires have already occurred in California this year. Wildfire season has effectively become a year-round concern, and the threat of a major incident is no longer confined to the historically “hot and dry” months. Therefore, it is important to remain vigilant and be prepared for a scenario requiring your evacuation. Efforts to enhance fire resiliency—both individually and collectively—are increasingly vital.

The best time to start defending your home from a wildfire is before an incident even begins. Many existing structures in the community are susceptible to damage or loss during a wildfire. Vulnerable features on a home can be retrofitted with home hardening mitigations, increasing a property’s ability to withstand a wildland fire.

The RSFFPD has identified the following as the community’s greatest exposures in two key categories, a property’s vulnerability to embers and the fire behavior potential in the surrounding environment.

Ember Vulnerable Structures: Wildfire damage inspections have revealed that wind driven embers from approaching fires are the leading cause of home ignition. These embers can enter through vents located on the roof, on walls, and at the foundation of residential structures. Embers also accumulate in vegetation and combustible items near the home or on wooden decks or attachments, igniting structures far beyond the fire front.

Fire Behavior Potential: Wildfire behavior is influenced by three main factors: Fuels, Topography, and Weather. The warm weather, scenic canyons, and abundant vegetation that make Rancho Santa Fe desirable also amplify the severity of fire conditions. Because we cannot control the weather nor the surrounding topography, it is essential that we reduce fuels. This is possible by creating proper defensible space, implementing Zone Zero, and maintaining fire resistive vegetation.

It is important that each homeowner in the District takes preventive measures to reduce the risk of fire spreading to their structures. When each homeowner does their part, we move toward a more wildfire resilient community together. To be best prepared for a wildfire event, the District requests that you maintain your property in accordance with RSFFPD’s adopted defensible space requirements, install a combustible free 5-foot “Zone Zero”, and harden your structures.



Direct and Indirect Home Ignition from Embers

Embers or firebrands are fragments of burning vegetation or other combustible materials. Under windy conditions, they can travel miles ahead of the wildfire's front and create spot fires or infiltrate vulnerable spaces in or around structures.



Embers cause structures to ignite in two ways.

1. Direct Ember Ignition - Embers accumulate inside or on the home.

A common case of direct ember ignition is when wind carries embers through your structure's vents (located under eaves, on the roof, at the foundation, on walls, etc.) and ignite attic insulation, wood framing, or combustible storage in attics. Embers can also accumulate on wood siding, wooden decks, or combustible roofs.



Vulnerability of Vents to Wind-Blown Embers. Credit: IBHS

2. Indirect Ember Ignition - Embers ignite vegetation near your home.

Indirect Ember Ignition is when embers fly onto your property and ignite combustibles attached to or around the home such as vegetation, mulch, storage sheds, etc. These burning materials create sufficient radiant heat and/or direct flame contact and can ignite structures.



Embers from the Saddleridge Fire flying around a Grenada Hills home on Oct. 11, 2019. Credit: Michael Owen Baker / AP / Shutterstock



Embers ignite pine needles in gutter during an IBHS home ignition simulation. Credit: National Geographic

How to Protect your Home from Ember Cast

Wildfire research strongly supports these two methods as the most effective improvement for ember protection.

1. Upgrade non-compliant venting to be ember resistant by installing vents or mesh screens that meet the ASTM testing standard E2886. This cost effective upgrade can protect your home from Direct Ember Ignition.

The following companies offer ember resistant products: Brandguard, Vulcan, Embers Out, Wildfire Defense Mesh, and FireStorm Ember Mesh.

Eaves



**Retrofit Ember Resistant
Bird Hole Vents**

Roof / Attic



**Ember Resistant Mesh
Installed Over Existing Roof Vent**

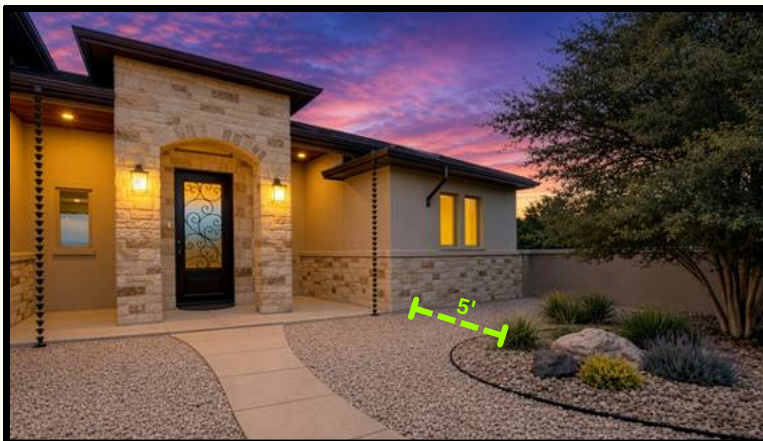
Crawlspaces & Garages



**Retrofit Ember Resistant
Crawlspace Vent**

2. Create a 5 foot wide Ember Resistant / Combustible Free Zone Zero around your home and complete home hardening retrofits.

Removing all vegetation, mulch, and combustibles around your structure and installing home hardening retrofits can significantly decrease the risk of Indirect Ember Ignition.



A new home with a 5 foot Combustible Free Zone



Embers ignite the mulch around the base of a residential structure during the Palisades Fire. Photo: LA Times



Rancho Santa Fe Fire

Home Hardening Retrofits

Coupled with Defensible Space, installing home hardening retrofits can greatly reduce the risk of damage or loss during a wildfire.



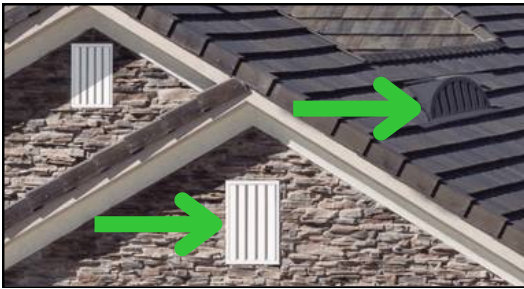
Class A Roof
Bird Stops
Metal Gutter

Non-combustible
Gutter
Screen



Roofing and Gutters

When it is time to replace your roof, replace it with fire-resistant Class A roof material. Block any spaces between your roof covering and sheathing (bird stops). Install non-combustible corrosion resistant metal gutter covers on gutters to prevent the accumulation of leaves and debris in the gutter.



Brandguard Ember Resistant Vents

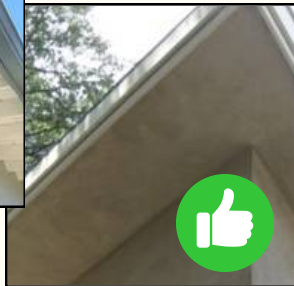
Attic Vents

Inspect your existing attic, crawl space, and wall vents. Replace or retrofit non-compliant vents with ember & flame-resistant vents that meet ASTM 2886 standards. ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) develops performance standards for building materials. Some listed and approved venting companies are: Brandguard, Vulcan, Embers Out, Wildfire Defense Mesh, and O'Hagin (Fire & Ice models only). Some manufacturers offer easy to install retrofit options that fit in place of or behind existing vents.



Open Wooden Eaves

Stucco Enclosed Eaves



Eaves

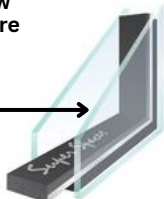
If you have exposed wooden eaves that are not of the heavy timber type (minimum 4" x 4" rafter tails, 2" thick tongue and groove starter board, and 3" thick fascia), consider enclosing or "boxing" the eaves with an ignition resistant material such as stucco or Hardie soffit panels.



Dual Pane Window
Survived LA Wildfire



Tempered Pane



Windows & Doors

Replace single pane windows with windows that are multi-paned with a minimum of one pane tempered glass. Ensure any vinyl window frames have metal reinforced corners which helps prevent the glass from falling out of place if the vinyl frame is damaged by a fire. Replace any plastic or acrylic skylights with multi-paned glass skylights with a minimum one pane tempered glass. Add a minimum 1/16" non-combustible screen behind any operable skylight. Exterior doors shall be minimum 1 3/8" thick or 20-minute rated. Glass doors shall be of multi paned glass with a minimum of one pane tempered glass. Louvered exterior doors shall be backed by ember resistant metal mesh. Install non-combustible weather stripping to seal gaps greater than 1/8-inch in garage doors to prevent ember intrusion.



Hardie Board Siding

Stone Siding



Exterior Siding

Inspect exterior siding for dry rot, gaps, cracks, and warping. Caulk or plug gaps greater than 1/16-inch in siding and replace any damaged boards, including those with dry rot. Replace combustible wood or vinyl siding with non-combustible materials such as stucco, metal, and masonry. You may also consider ignition resistant materials such as cement fiber board that meets ASTM E2768 (30 Minute Surface Burning) after ASTM D2898 (Accelerated Weathering).

Boxed In Decking



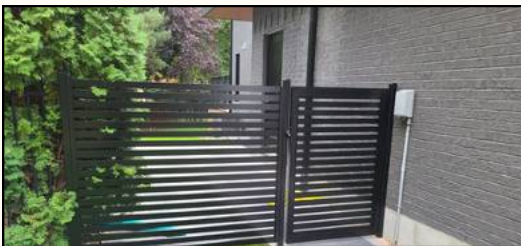
Heavy Timber Trellis



Auxiliary Structures & Attached Decks/Patio Covers

Skirt or box in any existing cantilevered or above grade decking with exposed structural members. Replace traditional wood decking with non-combustible or ignition-resistant materials. Provide metal flashing where the decking directly attaches to the wall of the home. Ensure your patio covers, gazebos, and trellises attached to the home are constructed of non-combustible, ignition-resistant materials, or heavy timber (minimum 4" nominal lumber size). Ensure that combustible items and vegetation are removed from underneath, on top of, or within five feet of a deck. Auxiliary structures such as sheds, detached patio covers, pergolas, etc. shall be constructed of ignition resistant materials and have a Class-A rated roof material. Combustible sheds shall be set back a minimum of 50 feet from your home. Maintain proper clearance from vegetation and provide defensible space around auxiliary structures.

Non-combustible Attached Fencing



Fencing

Remove attached combustible gates or fencing within the first 5 feet of the structure. Replace them with ignition resistant or noncombustible gates or fencing. Acceptable fencing materials are fire retardant treated lumber (Hoover-Exterior Fire-X or Chemco Saferwood/Thermex-FR), wrought iron, CMU, or stucco.

Garage Door Weather Stripping



Garage Doors

Use weather stripping to seal edges of garage doors to reduce gaps between doors and door openings to 1/8-inch or less. This will help prevent the intrusion of embers between these gaps. Weather stripping or seals shall be installed on the bottom, sides, and top of garage doors. Any windows in garage doors should be upgraded to a dual pane with a minimum of one pane tempered glass for increased protection.

Spark Arrestor



Chimneys

Cover chimney or stovepipe outlet with a noncombustible corrosion-resistant metal mesh screen, 12-gauge thickness or larger, with openings no greater than 1/2". Close the fireplace flue during fire season when the fireplace is not in use. Maintain a 10 foot space around chimney or stove pipe outlets clear of vegetation and combustibles. Additionally, maintain the same clearance for BBQs, fire pits, or other fire features.

Defensible Space Requirements

Rancho Santa Fe communities are located in Moderate, High, and Very High Hazard Fire Severity Zones. These communities often have hilly terrain filled with dense brush which can lead to extreme wildfire conditions. Overgrown vegetation allows fire to advance towards your structure. This mechanism is amplified when a fire is spreading up a slope.

It is necessary that you create and maintain your property's defensible space, which includes reducing and trimming vegetation in a strategic way.



A scorched hillside leading up to a damaged deck.
Credit: Cal Fire's Damage Inspection files from the 2025 Palisades Fire.



Zone 1 Guidelines (5-50 Feet) The Irrigated & Maintained Zone

- Regularly clear dead and/or dry vegetation.
- Plant and irrigate drought-tolerant and fire-resistant vegetation.
- Remove tree limbs within 10 feet of the roofline and chimney outlets.
- Remove all vegetation and combustibles within 10 feet of propane tanks.
- Firewood shall be stacked neatly at minimum 30 feet away from structures and property lines.
- Trash enclosures and cans shall be at least 10 feet away from structures and have a properly fitted lid.
- Create space between dense groupings of shrubs and vegetation leading to structures. (Including hedges)
- Limb up trees at least 6 feet above the ground. If there is vegetation below, trim trees to a height 3 times the height of any vegetation under the tree.

Zone 2 Guidelines (50-100 Feet) The Reduced Fuel Zone

- Remove all dead or dying vegetation.
- Trim and lace existing native vegetation by at least 50%.
- Create space between dense groupings of shrubs and vegetation leading to structures. (Including hedges)
- Limb up trees at least 6 feet above the ground. If there is vegetation below, trim trees to a height 3 times the height of any vegetation under the tree.

Zone Zero (0-5 Feet) The Ignition & Ember Resistant Zone

- Zone Zero extends outward 5 feet from all structures, including the eaves and any attached decks or shade structures.
- Remove combustibles such as mulch, shrubs, trees, vines, plastic pots, and patio furniture.
- Upgrade attached wooden features such as covered patios and decks to be made exclusively of ignition resistant material or heavy timber (4" or larger).
- Replace attached portions of wood or vinyl fences/gates with fire retardant treated lumber or metal fences/gates.
- Remove synthetic turf, storage sheds, and trash cans.
- Install noncombustible hardscape such as gravel, pavers, and concrete in this zone.

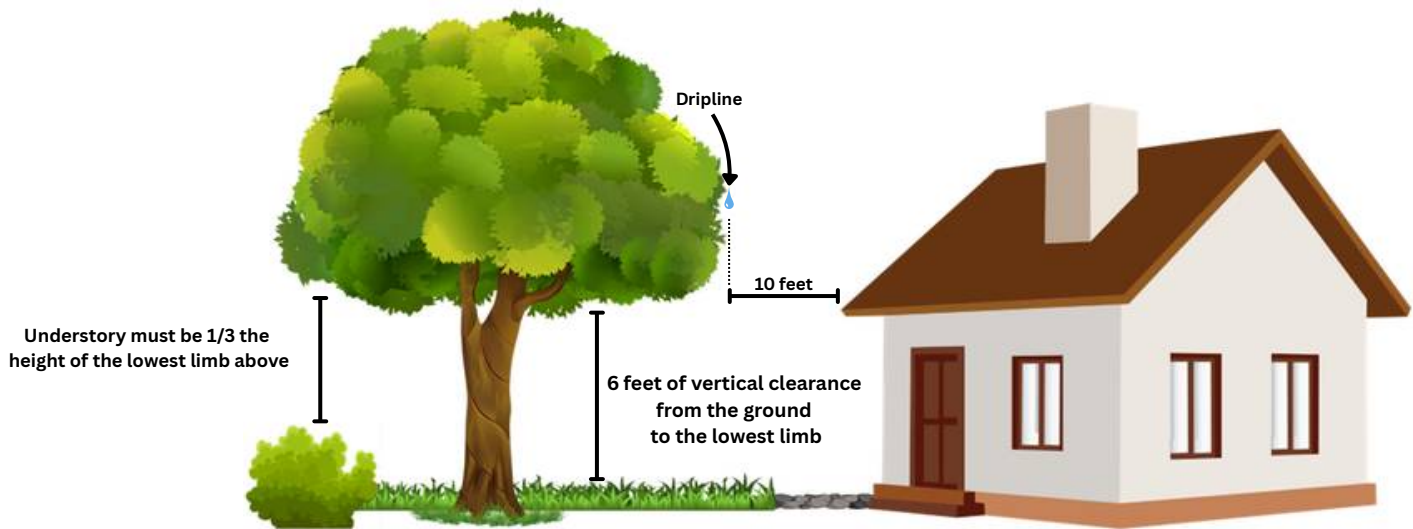


Horizontal Spacing of Vegetation

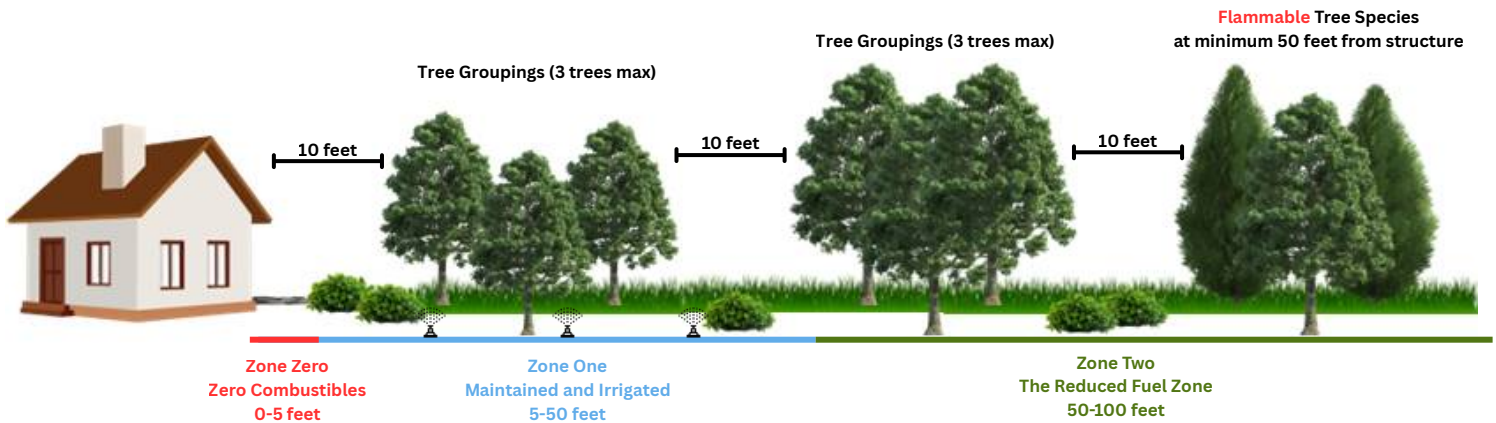
Create space between vegetation so an approaching fire cannot easily advance towards your home.

Defensible Space Requirements

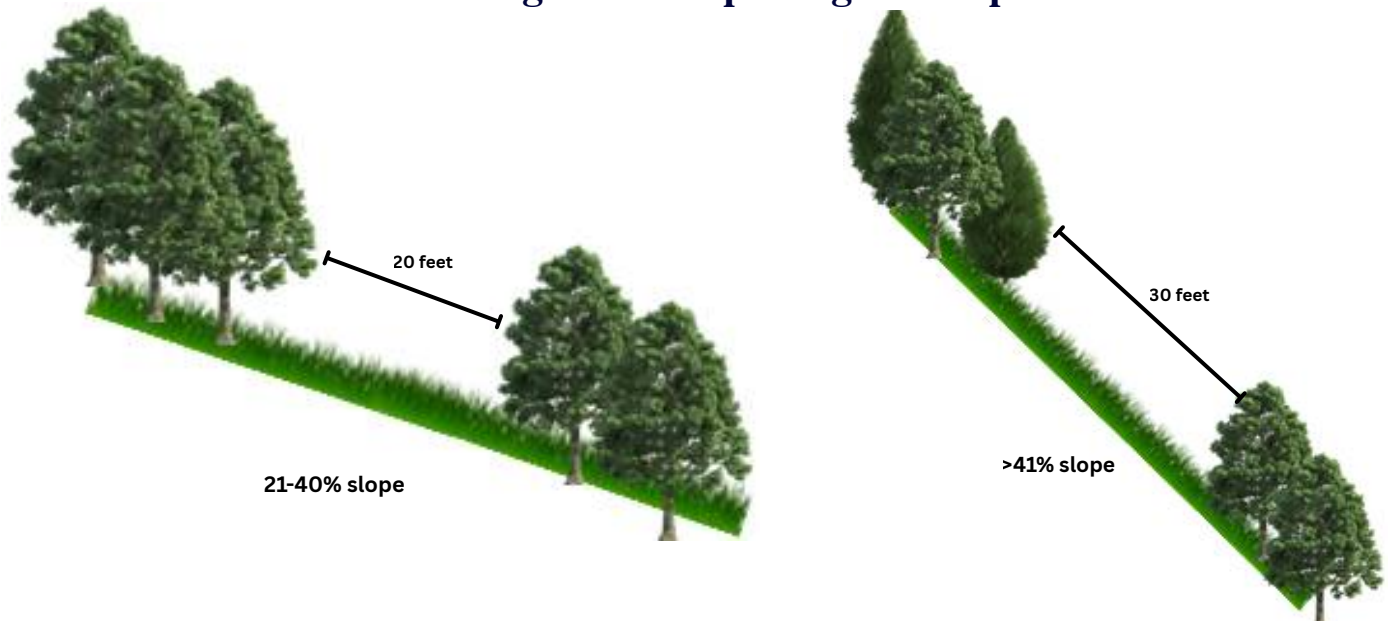
Tree Dripline-to-Structure & Vertical Spacing



Horizontal Spacing



Vegetation Spacing on Slopes



Highly Flammable Species

RSFFPD urges homeowners to remove existing highly flammable species within 50 feet of any structure.

These plant species have traits that make them readily ignitable and/or intensify fire behavior. Juniper and Cypress retain large amounts of dry dead material, which act as a readily ignitable sources of fuel. Pine, Spruce, Juniper, and Eucalyptus species contain volatile oils and resins that accelerate fire growth and produce more extreme heat. Palms with fibrous trunks become ember producers when they are burning.



Juniper Species



Italian Cypress



Pine Trees



Pygmy Date Palm



California Pepper



Canary Island Palm

Etienne Laurent / AP

If your property is out of compliance, you may receive a Weed Abatement Notice.
Please update your mailing address on file with the SD County Tax Assessor.

<https://www.sdarcc.gov/content/arcc/home/divisions/assessor/address-change-request.html>



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Weedabatement@RSF-Fire.org; Tel. (858) 756-6023

Board of Directors

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President John Tanner
Nancy Hillgren
Tucker Stine
Kevin Barnard

Fire Chief

David C. McQuead

NOTICE TO ABATE HAZARD – FINAL NOTICE

NOTE: THIS IS NOT A NOTICE TO GRADE YOUR PROPERTY

Date: 6/1/2026

APN: 0000-000-00

Dear: JANE & JOHN DOE

OR SUCH PERSON IN CHARGE, POSSESSION OF OR CONTROL OF THE PROPERTY

12345 VIA DE _____

RANCHO SANTA FE, CA

LOCATION OF HAZARD: 12345 VIA DE _____

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ABATEMENT

Please clear and maintain the area within twenty (20) feet of all roadways to be free of flammable vegetation and other combustible growth. Weeds and annual grasses shall be mowed to a height not exceeding four (4) inches, trees shall have limbs and branches removed within six (6) feet of the ground. Along your property line adjacent to 12345 VIA DE _____.

Please keep all palm trees free of dead palm fronds including the dried thatch that tends to accumulate on the trunk of the palm tree. Throughout the entire parcel.

San Diego County Property records show you as the owner of the parcel number listed above. It has been determined that fire hazard(s) exist on your property as defined in Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District's ("RSFFPD") Ordinance 2022-02 for vegetation management. You have failed to address this issue after prior notice.

(Visit www.rsffpd.org to view Ordinance 2022-02 in its entirety).

THIS IS CONSIDERED A FINAL NOTICE to abate the aforementioned fire hazard(s) on your property in accordance with RSFFPD Ordinance 2022-02. **Hazard abatement must be accomplished within 10 days of this notice.** Properties that have not been cleared or do not comply with the requirements within 10 days will be subject to RSFFPD's **Forced Abatement Process**. Property owners are strongly urged to arrange for the clearing of their own parcels, as the above requirements are strictly enforced.

PLEASE REFER TO RSFFPD ORDINANCE 2022-02.

Should you choose not to abate the above hazard, nor make an appeal, RSFFPD is authorized to hire a contractor to abate the hazard. The cost of abatement shall include, but is not limited to, the cost of the abatement, a Fire District administrative fee, and if applicable, include reasonable attorneys' fees and other costs incurred by the District to enforce such abatement. All abatement costs shall be billed to the parcel owner. Nonpayment of abatement costs shall constitute a special assessment to be placed on the respective parcel of land by the County of San Diego and collected at the time and in the manner of ordinary property taxes.

This Notice does not authorize you or anyone on your behalf to access an adjoining property to abate the hazard or to take any action on your property in contravention of any recorded restrictions, covenants or conditions.

If you do not own this property, have already cleared this property, believe you have received this notice in error, or wish to schedule an on-site meeting, please email Weedabatement@RSF-Fire.org as soon as possible. Should you disagree with the determination that a hazard exists, you may appeal this determination to the Board of Directors of RSFFPD within ten (10) days as set forth in RSFFPD Ordinance 2022-02.

Sincerely,

Rancho Santa Fe Fire - Fire Prevention

WARNING – ENVIRONMENTALLY PROTECTED PLANTS OR ANIMAL SPECIES

Clearing of vegetation as required by this letter that contains threatened or endangered species is subject to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Deliberate take or clearing or removal beyond that specifically allowed by this notice and the MOU is not authorized and may be in violation of the State and Federal Endangered Species Act. Please contact the fire district with questions about compliance with the MOU and this notice. You should also contact USFWS at (760) 431-9440 or CDFG (858) 467-4201 if you have been notified that you have a threatened or endangered species on your property.

Trees that grow near power lines and poles pose a potential fire hazard. San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) is required by law to maintain minimum clearances between all vegetation and power lines. No tree should be allowed to grow within 10 feet of electrical conductors.

SDG&E provides a list of suggested trees species that are appropriate to grow under or adjacent to power lines. This list, along with other information regarding SDG&E Vegetation Management, can be found at <https://www.sdge.com/safety/tree-planting-guide>



References & Image Credits

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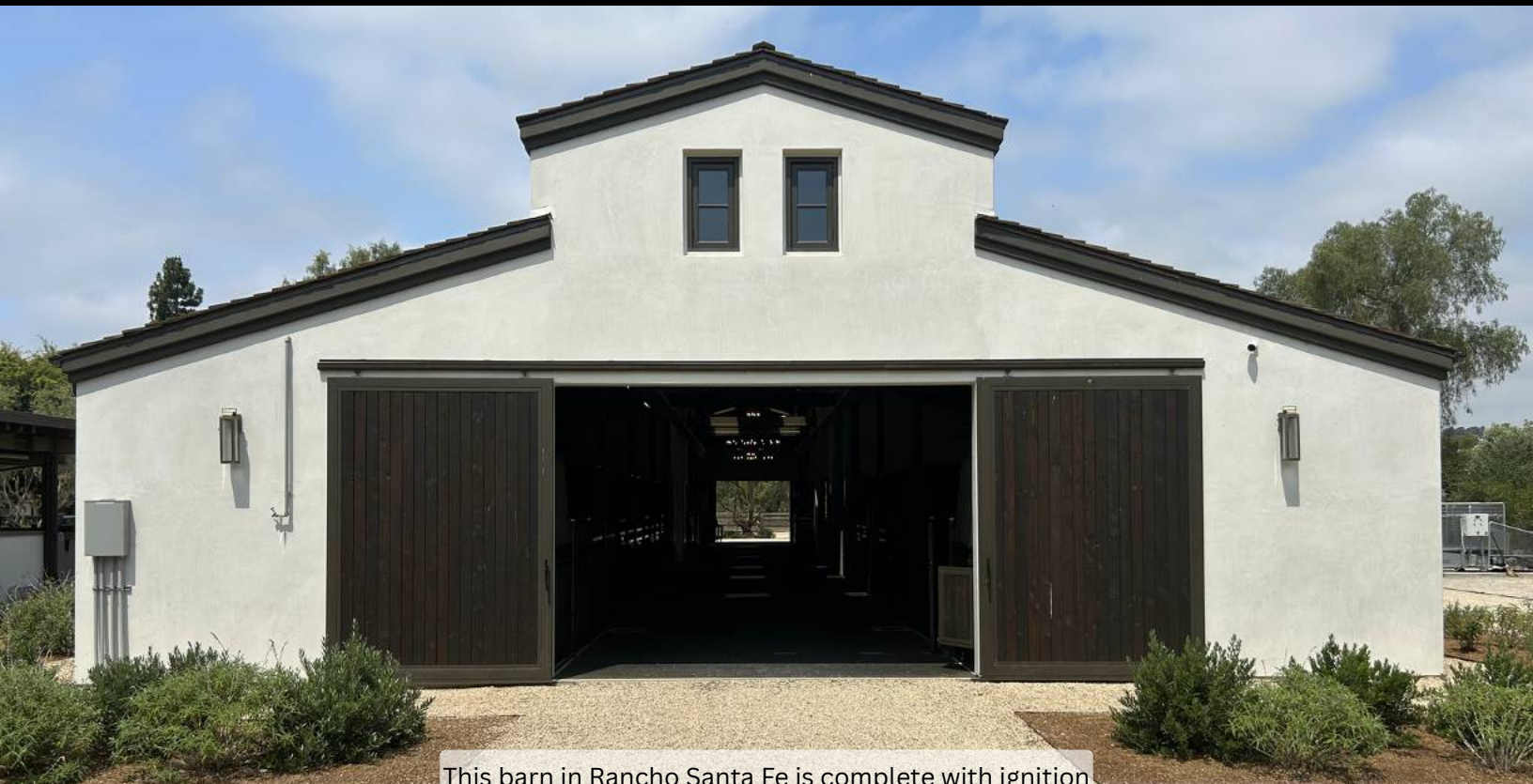
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This barn in Rancho Santa Fe is complete with ignition resistant construction materials and a non-combustible 5 foot Zone Zero landscape.