

TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

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NEWS RELEASE

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For Release Immediately

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MAY 1 GRADING SEASON STARTS TODAY, TRPA UPDATES AND RULE CHANGES IN EFFECT

Lake Tahoe, CA/NV –The start today of Lake Tahoe’s grading, digging and project season shares the spotlight this year with defensible space, BMPs, and some new and updated guidelines from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA). To protect from widespread erosion, grading in the Tahoe region is limited to dry months between May 1 and October 15. This is also the period when many homeowners will be thinking about protection from wildfire and installing stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs).

“Now that the snow is almost gone, people should be contacting the local fire agencies for their defensible space assessments and the conservation districts for BMP evaluations,” TRPA Community Liaison Jeff Cowen said. “TRPA staff had a busy winter working with fire and resource conservation pros streamlining ways to help people design and implement defensible space and BMPs. We are definitely on the same page and homeowners are going to benefit from the work we’ve done to unify our guidelines.”

For one, TRPA and fire professionals have agreed on the best way to manage pine needles in the defensible space zone. As in the past, from zero to five feet around any structure is the non-combustible zone which should be free of dead or dry materials including pine needles. New this year, the five-foot non-combustible zone will be a requirement for BMP certification. From five to 30 feet around structures is the lean, clean and green zone where pine needles over bare soil should be raked once in the spring and allowed to fall the rest of the year. As in the past, in healthy, vegetated areas within the five to 30 foot zone, pine needles should be removed as needed. Beyond 30 feet, pine needles are an option to covering bare soil, but should never be more than 2 to 3 inches thick.

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“There is a lot more to defensible space than pine needles and everyone should get an evaluation from their local fire agency,” Cowen said. “That’s partly why this year we are also requiring all construction applications get pre-approval stamps from the fire agencies before TRPA can begin our review.”

At the request of the Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs, all new and addition/modification construction projects requiring TRPA review must first be pre-approved by the local fire protection district or department. Applications for scenic assessment in the shorezone are the only non-construction applications that must have fire district pre-approval since vegetation plays a role in the scenic rating of properties along Lake Tahoe’s shore, Cowen said.

Additionally, in December last year, the TRPA Governing Board eased the way for homeowners to handle tree removal. To create defensible space, homeowners can now remove trees up to 14” diameter without a permit. Permits for removal of vegetation and trees smaller than 14” diameter are still needed in sensitive environmental areas: stream zones and on the lakeward side of lakefront parcels. Regardless, homeowners only need to call the local fire district office for any questions and tree permit needs, Cowen said.

“We’ve made defensible space a one-stop shop at the fire district offices,” Cowen said. “Homeowners need only call the fire district to set an appointment for a defensible space assessment from the fire pros. They will tell you what vegetation is allowed, what trees can be removed and how to manage your property for fire safety.”

Other steps taken to assist in wildfire protection include:

- TRPA foresters and fire agencies have trained and certified fire professionals to be Defensible Space Assessors, allowing more people to permit trees over 14” for removal.
- TRPA is completing an online database to track defensible space and fuel reduction work in the Basin where homeowners will be able view the safety rating of their parcel and surrounding areas. The database will be populated continuously as defensible space evaluations are carried out.
- The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team has been formed from staff at multiple fire and resource management agencies to prioritize and coordinate fuel reduction

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projects and collaborate on funding. TRPA staff will have an active role on the Team, which will act as the sole reviewing and permitting panel for all large-scale fuel treatment projects.

- In conjunction with the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, the Fire Public Information Team is coordinating outreach events and educational materials that unify information for homeowners on water conservation, defensible space, BMPs, invasive weeds and backyard conservation techniques.

Other updates and new items to note include:

- Residential BMP projects will begin requiring an intermediate inspection before infiltration trenches and dry wells are filled with gravel. Photographs of the open trenches showing their depth are also acceptable. BMP projects done in conjunction with a construction permit will be required to have an intermediate inspection this year, and BMP retrofit projects not tied to a permit will begin the requirement in 2009.
- Application filing fee structure has been updated to implement fee deposit accounts for certain applications so that the Agency's costs are recovered for time spent on an individual permit application. Few base fees increased.
- Air and Water Quality mitigation fees increased to reflect increasing construction costs to local agencies for environmental improvement projects. Water quality mitigation fees increased \$0.22 to \$1.86 per square foot and air quality mitigation fees increased by \$55.84 to \$325.84 per daily vehicle trip on residential projects. Commercial air quality mitigation fees increased by \$6.20 to \$36.20 per vehicle trip.

More information is also available at www.trpa.org.

Homeowners can request a free BMP site evaluation from one of two local resource conservation districts. The conservation districts are non-regulatory agencies offering free advice and BMP plans to homeowners through on-site evaluations.

For homes in Nevada, contact the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District at (775) 586-1610. In California, contact the Tahoe Resource Conservation District at (530) 543-1501.

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For a defensible space evaluation or to submit construction plans for pre-TRPA approval, contact your local fire protection district or department.

City of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department	(530) 541-6160	www.slafd.org
Lake Valley Fire Protection District	(530) 577-3737	www.lvfpd.org
Fallen Leaf Lake Fire Department	(530) 542-1343	
Meeks Bay Fire Protection District	(530) 525-7548 ext. 15	www.meeksbayfire.com
North Tahoe Fire Protection District -tree removal/assessments	(530) 546-2212	www.ntfire.net
North Tahoe Fire Protection District -construction plan check	(530) 583-9613	
North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District	(775) 831-0351, ext 0	www.nltfpd.net
Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District	(775) 588-3591 ext. 227	www.tahoefire.com

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency cooperatively leads the effort to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique natural and human environment of the Lake Tahoe Region now and in the future. For additional information, call Jeff Cowen at (775) 589-5278 or email to jcowen@trpa.org.

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