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FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU  
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## STANDARD 14.9.2

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### APPLICATION OF MULCH AND CHIPS in DEFENSIBLE SPACE (Ref: Ventura County Fire Code, Section 2808 & Appendix W)

*The information contained in this standard is provided solely for the convenience of the reader and was being enforced by the Ventura County Fire Protection District at the time of its publication. The District reserves the right to make changes and improvements to this standard as and when required by law, or otherwise, at any time. (The District's current standards will be posted and made available for downloading by the public at the following web site: <http://fire.countyofventura.org>.)*

*Please note that the District assumes no liability for any damages incurred directly or indirectly as a result of any errors, omissions, or discrepancies between this standard and any applicable law. It is the sole responsibility of the person or persons conducting any work pursuant to this standard to ensure their work complies with any and all applicable codes, ordinances, and regulations.*

#### CHAPTER 1 ADMINISTRATION

- 1.1 Scope.** This standard is the approved requirements of the fire code official under Ventura County Fire Code (VCFC), Section 2808 and Appendix W. This standard applies to the application of mulch and wood chips in defensible space areas. This standard shall also be used in conjunction with Ventura County Resource Management Agency (RMA) (Planning & Environmental Health Divisions), Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner, VCFC, Ventura County Ordinance Code (VCOC) and other applicable Laws, Regulations, Rules and Codes including incorporated Cities, (if applicable). Where any conflict occurs with the requirements of this standard and other Laws, Regulations, Rules and Codes, the most restrictive application shall apply, unless prohibited by Law.
- 1.2 Purpose.** This standard was developed to address the concerns and issues associated with fires starting within or spreading from mulch and wood chips that have been spread within the defensible space area around structures. These fires pose hazards to emergency responders, the surrounding communities and the wildland area. This standard is intended to provide basic fire safety measures that should limit fire spread within the defensible area.
- 1.3 Responsibility.** All parcel owners who apply (spread) mulch and wood chips in any required defensible space area are subject to the requirements of the VCFC and this standard.
- 1.4 Modifications.** Increases in the limitations of this standard may be considered on a case-by-case basis. A written request and justification prepared by a qualified expert acceptable to the fire code official and based upon site-specific conditions shall be submitted and approved prior to land application. Such written requests shall be made by the property owner of record. Additional measures to prevent the ignition and spread of fire shall be provided as approved by the fire code official.

## CHAPTER 2 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 General.** The following words and terms shall, for the purposes of this standard, have the meanings shown herein.
- 2.2 Compost and Compostable Material.** “Compost” and “Compostable Material” shall mean any organic material that when accumulated is capable of rapid decomposition and generating temperatures of at least 122 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2.3 Contaminants.** “Contaminants” shall mean pieces of non-compostable solid waste that include, but are not limited to, plastics, metals, glass, clothing, wood which contains lead-based paint or wood preservatives, and other similar materials. Ref: VCOC Sec 4701
- 2.4 Disposal.** As defined by VCOC, Section 4701.
- 2.5 Invasive Species.** Current inventory provided by the [California Invasive Plant Council](#)
- 2.6 Organic Mulch.** “Organic Mulch” shall mean compostable material limited to landscape waste and crop production byproducts consisting of leaves, yard trimmings, wood waste, branches and stumps, and whole plants/trees, that have been mechanically reduced in size and have been composted prior to application.
- 2.7 Wood Chips.** “Wood Chips” shall be from trees only. No hazardous brush is allowed including, but not limited to: sage, coyote brush or chamise. Chips should average 2-4 inches in length. Fine ground or stringy types of material which can ignite faster and burn more readily shall not be used. These materials include, but are not limited to, Gorilla Hair (shredded redwood or western red cedar) and Coconut fiber. Wood chips are not required to be composted prior to applications.
- 2.8** For purposes of this standard, the terms **Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ), Hazardous Fire Area (HFA), State Responsibility Area (SRA), and Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Area,** shall be as defined in Chapter 2 the Ventura County Fire Code (VCFC).

### VCFC Chapter 2

**HAZARDOUS FIRE AREA (HFA)** is land which is covered with grass, grain, brush, or forest, whether privately or publicly owned, which is so situated or is of such inaccessible location that a fire originating upon such land would present an abnormally difficult job of suppression or would result in great and unusual damage through fire or resulting erosion and includes any location within 500 feet of a forest or brush, grass, or grain covered land, exclusive of small individual lots or parcels of land located outside of a brush, forest grass, or grain covered area.. Such areas are designated by the fire code official. The fire code official is authorized to utilize, as references, the definition of Wildland-Urban Interface Area, State SRA maps, Local Agency Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps designated pursuant to California Government Code, Sections 51175 through 51189 and the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code.

## CHAPTER 3 GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 Type of Material.** Mulch and wood chips consisting of invasive species, hazardous trees, non-native vegetation, pine needles, leaves, grass and in-organic materials, such as shredded rubber, are not allowed within the required defensible space zone.

- 3.2 Maximum Depth of Application.** The application and spread depth shall not exceed two (2) inches in height within the required defensible space zone.
- 3.3 Composted Material.** Organic mulch shall be clean and already composted.
- 3.4 Contaminants.** Organic mulch and wood chips shall be free of any contaminants.
- 3.5 Delivery for Land Application.** Organic mulch and wood chips delivered to a parcel for land application shall be applied within Seven (7) days of delivery or placed into piles complying with VCFD Standard 14.9.1. At no time shall any pile exceed 6 feet in height.
- 3.6 Limitations.** Land application within the required defensible space zone shall be in accordance with Table 3.6. Land application outside the required defensible space shall be in accordance with Ventura County Ordinance Code and VCFD Standard 14.9.1 as applicable.

**Table 3.6 Land Application Limitations within Defensible Space of a Structure**

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Distance from Structure</b>	<b>Requirement of Application</b>
A	0 - 5 feet	Land application prohibited. Must use non-combustible materials such as gravel, decompose granite, etc.
B	>5 - 30 feet	Limited non-continuous use of organic mulch is allowed. No wood chips. Use a mosaic (non-uniform) pattern with a maximum application area of 20-feet x 20-feet and a minimum 5-foot separation between application areas.
C	>30 - 100 feet	Organic mulch and wood chips allowed. No limitation on application areas.
D	>100 - 200 feet	Same as Zone C or as determined by the Fire Code Official if additional defensible space is required for the parcel beyond 100 feet.

#### **CHAPTER 4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For questions regarding this standard, please contact the Fire Hazard Reduction Program Unit (FHRP) at [fhrrp@ventura.org](mailto:fhrrp@ventura.org) or 805-389-9759.

Additional information regarding defensible space requirements, fire hazard reduction and general fire safety, please visit [www.vcfhrp.org](http://www.vcfhrp.org) and [www.vcreadyssetgo.org](http://www.vcreadyssetgo.org)