



EL CERRITO-KENSINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

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DATE: August 24, 2026

TO: David Aranda: General Manager

FROM: Eric Saylors: Fire Chief

RE: Fire Chief's Report for the September 2026 Kensington Community Services District

Fire Prevention: California Adopts Zone Zero Regulations

On August 19, 2026, the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection approved the state's first Zone 0 defensible-space regulations. Zone 0 is the first five feet around a home or other occupied structure—the area where wind-driven embers commonly collect against walls, beneath eaves, on decks, in gutters, and around combustible landscaping.

The rules apply in State Responsibility Areas and in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within Local Responsibility Areas. Kensington is within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, so the regulations will become part of the community's defensible-space program after the state package completes administrative review and becomes effective.

Importantly, the regulations do not require every existing homeowner to complete every improvement immediately. New construction must comply when the rule becomes effective, while existing homes receive a phased implementation period focused first on education, inspection, and measurable progress.

ZONE 0 FIRST 5 FEET

Around homes and occupied structures

Reduce the fuels most likely to carry embers into walls, windows, decks, eaves, roofs, and fence attachments.

What the State Rules Require

1	2	3
REMOVE COMBUSTIBLES	MAINTAIN VEGETATION	PROTECT CONNECTION POINTS
Remove firewood, stored wood, bark mulch, wood chips, dead leaves, needles, branches, and other combustible debris from Zone 0. Keep roofs and gutters clean and remove dead or dying vegetation.	Existing trees may remain when properly maintained. Remove dead wood and ladder fuels, maintain clearance from roofs, eaves, and chimneys, and use only permitted low-growing or non-woody vegetation outside required safety buffers.	Create a noncombustible safety zone next to walls and beneath eaves. Use a noncombustible section where fences or gates attach to a structure, and address sheds or outbuildings located within Zone 0.

ZONE ZERO IS NOT A BLANKET BAN ON ALL TREES OR ALL PLANTS

Existing trees and certain well-maintained herbaceous plants may remain when spacing, maintenance, and safety-zone requirements are met.



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Phased Implementation: Three Years + Five Years

The state deliberately adopted a multi-year rollout for existing homes. The Board's stated approach is to prioritize education and outreach, give homeowners time to plan and budget, and use inspections to identify issues and demonstrate progress rather than expect an immediate full retrofit.

The exact calendar dates will begin when the regulation becomes effective. The state framework is organized as follows:

RULE EFFECTIVE NEW CONSTRUCTION	PHASE 1 FIRST 3 YEARS	PHASE 2 BY YEAR 5
New construction complies when state administrative review is complete and the regulation becomes effective. Local agencies begin training, public education, and inspection-system updates.	Remove combustible materials within five feet; clean roofs and gutters; remove dead and dying vegetation; maintain trees; and adjust landscaping to the vegetation allowed by the rule.	Complete the immediate under-eave safety zone; replace combustible gates or fence attachments; and make required adjustments to sheds and fencing. The local jurisdiction assigns the schedule within the five-year limit.

Department Implementation Plan for Kensington

The El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department has developed a plan to integrate Zone 0 into the existing annual vegetation-management and defensible-space inspection cycle, rather than create a separate surprise enforcement program. The plan will be coordinated with surrounding fire agencies so residents receive consistent interpretations and practical guidance across jurisdictional boundaries.

1 REGIONAL ALIGNMENT Confirm the final rule language and effective date; coordinate definitions, inspector training, checklists, notices, and correction guidance with neighboring agencies.	2 INSPECTION INTEGRATION Add a Zone 0 section to annual inspection forms. Inspectors will document baseline conditions, identify priority hazards, and separate current requirements from later-phase work.
3 EDUCATION + PROGRESS During the first three years, emphasize education, low-cost actions, and measurable progress. Follow-up inspections will recognize completed work and identify the next reasonable priority.	4 LOCAL PHASE 2 SCHEDULE Develop the local schedule for under-eave buffers, gates, fencing, and outbuildings. Any local alternative or governing-body action will be brought forward after regional coordination and public outreach.

What Kensington Residents Should Expect

Residents should expect Zone 0 guidance to appear during the normal inspection period, with clear written explanations of what is required now, what may be completed later, and the applicable deadline. The Department will continue to encourage early voluntary action because the first five feet can materially affect whether embers ignite a structure, but the inspection process will reflect the state's phased compliance schedule.

Until the regulation becomes effective and the regional implementation materials are finalized, residents should continue meeting existing vegetation-management requirements and may begin with simple actions: move firewood and combustible storage away from structures, remove dead material, clean roofs and gutters, and avoid adding new combustible landscaping or fence components in the first five feet.

EDUCATION FIRST • PHASED COMPLIANCE • REGIONAL CONSISTENCY

Zone 0 will be implemented through the Department's established inspection program, with time for residents to plan and complete improvements.

Selected State Sources

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, press release approving Zone 0 regulations (August 19, 2026); August 2026 Zone 0 regulation summary and adopted rule package; Notice of Proposed Emergency Action (August 20, 2026); CAL FIRE Office of the State Fire Marshal, Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

Mission: Protect Lives and Property

Integrity Accountability Teamwork Respect Professionalism