

Defensible space law to be enforced

[ADAM JENSEN](#) / TAHOE DAILY TRIBUNE,

California's defensible space law was passed in January 2005, but has yet to be enforced in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Until now.

This summer, California fire officials in the basin plan to enforce public resources code 4291, which requires homeowners to reduce the risk of structures igniting in a wildfire by clearing flammable materials from within 100 feet of their homes, or to their property line.

"We cannot change topography, we cannot change the weather, but we can change the fuel," said Mary Huggins, Cal Fire Tahoe Basin Fire Chief.

Although homeowners could be subject to fines between \$100 and \$500 for not complying with the law, fire officials intend to work with homeowners and issue fines only when a homeowner repeatedly refuses to create defensible space on their property, Huggins said.

"We're just don't hand people a fine, that's not how it works," Huggins said. "We want compliance and not to have to go to enforcement."

Second homeowners who only come to their properties once or twice a year, and who may not understand the threat wildfires present to basin communities, creates a unique challenge to increasing the amount of defensible space in the area, Huggins said.

A lack of adequate staff prevented previous enforcement of the defensible space law, but an emergency declaration by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger after the Angora fire brought necessary funding to the basin, Huggins said.

Early this month Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons signed legislation requiring property owners on the Nevada side of the basin to maintain defensible space.

Although interest in defensible space "ebbs and flows" depending on the weather and when wildfires start to crop up throughout the West, the poor economy has also prevented people from implementing their measures on their properties, said Jessica Moore-Mahnken, a project coordinator with the Nevada Fire Safe Council, which operates on both sides of the basin.

But there is help available.

Eligible homeowners can receive a rebate of 50 percent of defensible space costs up to \$1,000. Funds are limited and issued on a first come first served basis, according to a statement from the fire safe council.

Since the beginning of the program in May 2008, more than 800 rebates totaling \$520,000 in Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act money have been issued to basin homeowners, according to the statement.

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