

Eco-Tip of the Week for 6-18-17

Brush Clearance Deadline Passed Last Week: Options to Avoid Cost and Risk

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Each year, hundreds of goats clear dry grasses from hillsides throughout Ventura County. It's one of the many creative ways homeowners, businesses and the Fire Department remove hazardous brush to reduce the threat of fires.

Each year by June 1, thousands of homeowners and property managers are required to remove natural vegetation from around homes and structures in an effort to help the Ventura County Fire Department prepare for a dry summer and high wildfire season.

"Goats are a very effective and environmentally friendly way to clear brush," VCFD Capt. Ken Vanwig said. "They eat all the way down to the ground, leaving no fuel left for a fire to consume,"

Goats provide several advantages over humans with power tools. They can easily eat plants like poison oak and thistle, which humans find difficult to clear. Goats do not spark fires, as is possible with brush removal machinery. On large, steep, hard-to-access properties, hiring a goat herder can be less expensive than hiring a brush clearance crew.

Hillside properties face erosion risks following brush clearance, whether the clearance is done by grazing animals or conventional methods of brush clearance. Regardless of which method you use for reducing fire dangers, preventing erosion following clearance can be accomplished by applying mulch or replanting appropriate species.

For information regarding application of wood chips and mulch in the clearance zone, please visit www.vcfhrp.org. You can see the Fire Department's standard guidelines for "application of mulch and chips in defensible space" at <https://goo.gl/O1jqLD>

"Well-placed, maintained vegetation beautifies and controls erosion in residential neighborhoods," said Larry Williams, Fire Prevention Supervisor. "The Fire Hazard Reduction Program (FHRP) is designed to minimize fire danger by controlling the density and placement of flammable vegetation."

The goal is to maintain trees and vegetation that beautify and benefit a property, while removing hazardous vegetation that provides a combustible fuel supply for wildfire.

In May, Ventura County Fire partnered with the Ojai Valley Fire Safe Council to host a chipper day event in Ojai. The Ojai Valley Chipper Day provided free service of turning brush into mulch. You can rent a chipper to make your own mulch, contract with a company providing that service, or purchase mulch.

Mulch can be purchased at local garden stores, home improvement stores, some equipment rental yards, and from processors of yard trimmings and other organic material. This latter category of companies making and selling both mulch and compost includes Agromin's site at Ormond Beach (they also sell from their office location in Oxnard), Peach Hill near Moorpark, and American Soils near Simi Valley.

Additional locations also make and offer just mulch, but not compost. These include Agromin's site at the Simi Valley Landfill (805/485-9200) and Ojai Valley Organics Recycling Center (805/640-9194).

Besides wood chips made from recycled woody discards such as curbside collected yard clippings, many landscape designs incorporate mulch made of different materials, such as bark, small rocks, decomposed granite or even chipped tires. These other materials can also help soil retain moisture, moderate soil temperature, and suppress weeds, but they may be less beneficial economically and ecologically. We make our own mulch in Ventura County; buying mulch made from yard clippings keeps money circulating to local businesses, funding local jobs, and helping to control disposal costs.

Property owners with questions about the Fire Hazard Reduction program can call (805) 389-9759 or send an email to fhrp@ventura.org. For additional information on the Fire Hazard Reduction Program or to find out if work on a parcel has been approved, visit www.vcfhrp.org.

On the net:

www.vcfhrp.org

www.brushgoats4hire.com