COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PLANNING AND BUILDING

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IMPORTANT NOTICE REGARDING PERMIT EXEMPTION FOR TREE REMOVAL

Date of Notice: July 1, 2026

Purpose: Inform the Public that No Permit is Required to Remove Certain Trees that Cause a Hazard to Life and Personal Property

Duration of Exemption: July 1, 2026 to July 1, 2027

Issued By: Steve Monowitz, Planning and Building Director

Discussion

The San Mateo County Significant Tree Regulations ("Regulations") generally require that a property owner secure a permit before removing a "significant tree," which is defined as any tree with a trunk that has a circumference of thirty-eight inches (38") or more when measured at four and one-half feet (4 1/2') vertically above the ground. However, Section 12,020.1(c) of these Regulations provides an exemption from the requirement to secure a permit to remove a significant tree when a specified official, including the Community Development Director or an Officer of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, determines removal is necessary to "*remove a hazard to life and personal property* …".

On June 24, 2021, in light of then-existing elevated wildfire hazard risks in the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County, I, as the Community Development Director, issued a permit exemption for removal of certain significant trees that cause a hazard to life and personal property. Extensions of this exemption have been issued for each of the following years. The attached letter from Deputy Chief Ryan West of the State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's San Mateo – Santa Cruz Unit identifies that those wildfire risks remain elevated in the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County, and requests that the County continue to take specific exemptive action related to tree removal permits for certain non-native species in order help increase defensible space and minimize hazards.

Based on this correspondence, I conclude that certain trees, by virtue of species and location, continue to present a hazard to life and personal property while these conditions persist.

Specifically, all eucalyptus, pines, acacia, tan oak and bay trees within the unincorporated area of San Mateo County and located (1) within 100 feet of any habitable structure (including structures on properties adjacent to the property with the subject tree) or (2) within 30 feet of a public or private road necessary for emergency evacuations, present a significant fire hazard risk and a hazard to life and personal property. Such trees may therefore be removed without a Significant Tree Removal Permit during the period of July 1, 2026 to July 1, 2027.

Persons who remove such trees must have written permission from the owner of the property on which the tree is located and are responsible for ensuring that all associated debris is chipped and retained on site and/or properly disposed of. If assistance is needed in determining whether a tree is of a species that is included in this exemption, please contact the Resource Conservation District at fire@sanmateoRCD.org.