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## **LANDSCAPE MATERIALS INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN**

**This bulletin is for informational purposes only and does not replace any code or standard. Please contact the [Manville Bureau of Fire Safety](#) for specific questions.**

The Uniform Fire Code's adoption of the 2018 IFC-NJ includes new regulations for combustible landscape materials. The Department has identified a long-standing trend of fires involving combustible landscape materials which have resulted in the loss of life and property. These regulations were developed by the Fire Code Advisory Council and NJ Fire Safety Commission through many years of research to address a hazard not previously regulated by the Uniform Fire Code.

The new code sections read as follows:

**Section 305.6 Landscape Materials.** The use of combustible landscape materials, such as wood-based mulch products, is prohibited in any of the following conditions:

1. Within 18-inches of any building or structure;
2. Within 18-inches of a deck, porch, balcony, or any other portion of the building constructed of combustible material; or
3. Within 18-inches of any designated smoking area defined in Section 310.2

### ***Exceptions:***

1. Live plant materials such as shrubs, flowers, and trees provided that they are not located beneath a combustible overhang with less than 6-feet of clearance.
2. Non-combustible building or structure exterior that have no combustible components or trim with less than 3-feet clearance from grade.
3. Fire resistant mulch.

Note—"Combustible Components may include but are not limited to; plastic downspouts, exterior sump pump plumbing and other plumbing or electrical components attached to the structure.

**Section 305.7 Existing Materials.** This provision shall be come operative on April 15, 2025, all occupancies subject to this code shall remove all combustible landscape materials as described above that are located within 18-inches of the foundation of any building or structure or in the area of any designated smoking area. These materials may be removed or replaced with noncombustible materials such as stone or sand.

### **Important Points to Remember**

a. The combustible landscape material requirements only apply at buildings, structures, and premises subject to the NJ Uniform Fire Code and does not include owner occupied single & two-family dwellings used exclusively for dwelling purposes (see N.J.A.C. 5:70-2.1)

b. 'Combustible landscape materials' include any combustible materials placed on the ground to enrich or insulate the soil, prevent erosion, or control weeds. Common examples include pine needles, shredded bark, rubber & synthetic products, and recycled tree products. The term 'combustible landscape materials' does not include fencing, decorations & ornaments, or live plants. {See 'e' below}

c. When the building, structure, or premise is using non-combustible materials within its exterior exposed assemblies or exterior finishes for a minimum height of 3-feet above the surrounding grade there is no limitation on the use of combustible landscape materials.

d. When measuring for the 18-inches of clearance to a building, structure, deck, porch, or balcony the limitation includes both horizontally and vertically. This means that there must be at least 18-inches of horizontal distance and 18-inches of vertical distance between the nearest edge of landscape materials to the building, structure, deck, porch, or balcony under the above regulations.

e. While live planted flowers, trees, and shrubs are excluded from the definition of combustible landscape materials they are still subject to the 6-foot vertical clearance to combustible building overhangs specified in Exception 1.

f. The use of fire-resistant mulch products under Exception 3 would not be subject to the clearance and proximity limitations of these regulations for either combustible or noncombustible constructed buildings. At the present time there are no recognized testing or product listing standards to verify a mulch product as fire resistant. There are also a number of products, such as spray treatments and colorants, available that can be applied to certain landscape materials to achieve a measure of fire resistance. When such products or treatment are proposed the code official should carefully review all literature provided by the property owner or landscape contractor and be aware of product use & environmental limitations, and effective protection durations.

g. In addition to these new prescriptive requirements for combustible landscape materials other UFC code sections relating to electrical hazards, unsafe wiring, and use of listed & labeled lighting products are unaffected and remain citable regardless of landscape material type, proximity to combustible materials, or location on the premise.

h. The Uniform Construction Code does not regulate exterior landscape materials nor does it contain these new UFC requirements. This means that a newly constructed building could be found in violation of this section of the NJ Uniform Fire Code at any point in time after a Certificate of Occupancy / Continued Occupancy may be issued. The existence of a UCC issued certificate does not preclude a potential violation and citation under the NJ Uniform Fire Code.

i. These new regulations were developed specifically to address the hazard of fire spread to buildings and structures from closely placed combustible landscape materials. The regulations do not address or otherwise regulate combustible landscape materials which are located on a property or premise but not within the horizontal or vertical distances of a building or structure specified in the code.

Through Section 305.7 the effective date of these regulations on existing premises with existing combustible landscape materials is **April 15, 2025**. This provides time for code officials, property owners, and landscape contractors to develop plans and implement solutions for compliance at locations where existing landscape materials may violate the regulations.

