

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

TO: Clerk of the Board
County of Santa Barbara
105 East Anapamu Street - Room 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

FROM: Santa Barbara County
Air Pollution Control District
260 N. San Antonio Road, Suite A
Santa Barbara, CA 93110

Project I.D.: Authority to Construct (ATC) No. 16470
Project Title: Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project
Project Applicant: United States Forest Service (USFS)
Project Location: In or near the Los Padres National Forest

Project Description: The subject permit authorizes the use of an air curtain incinerator at various locations in or near the Los Padres National Forest in Santa Barbara County in support of the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project. As part of the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project, fuel breaks will be created in the areas around the communities of Painted Cave, San Marcos Trout Club, Haney Tract, and Rosario Park. Shrubs cut for fuel breaks around infrastructure are often left onsite, posing a significant wildfire risk. In partnership with the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, the USFS will use an air curtain incinerator to address biomass disposal and reduce hazardous fuels by converting biomass created as part of this project into biochar.

Exempt Status:

CEQA Section(s):

- ☐ Ministerial (Section 21080 (b)(1); 15268)
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Section 21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- ☐ Emergency Project (Section 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))
- ☐ Categorical Exemption (Cite section: _____)
- ☐ Statutory Exemption (Cite section: _____)

Other Basis for Exemption:

- ☐ General "Common Sense" Exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3)
- ☐ District CEQA Guidelines, Appendix A ("District List of Exempt Projects")
- ☒ Other: California Public Resources Code Section 4799.05, Subdivision (d)(2)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt:

This project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Public Resources Code Section 4799.05, Subdivision (d)(2) that provides that CEQA does not apply to the issuance of a permit or other project approval by a state or local agency for prescribed fire, reforestation, habitat restoration, thinning, or fuel reduction projects, or to related activities included in the project description, undertaken, in whole or in part, on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The project meets the qualifications specified in this section given that:

Notice of Exemption from CEQA (continued)

- 1) The project includes prescribed fire, thinning, and fuel reduction activities undertaken on federal, and immediately adjacent non-federal, land (along the administrative forest boundary) in the San Marcos Pass area of the Santa Ynez Mountains in the Santa Barbara Ranger District of Los Padres National Forest to reduce the risk of wildfire. Specifically, the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project applies thinning and brush control to enhance community wildfire protection and reduce the risk of loss of human life, structures, improvements, and natural resources from wildland fire and subsequent floods. This is accomplished by creating and improving fuel breaks located around several local communities in zones of strategic importance for wildfire suppression efforts. Activities cover approximately 198 acres. The intensity of fire behavior within these zones is reduced by reducing the amount and changing the arrangement of flammable vegetation and protecting wildlife habitat. The vegetative material cut as a result of these treatments is either masticated or chipped and left on the site to decompose, piled and burned on the site, or jackpot burned.
- 2) The project was evaluated under NEPA as part of the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project and its corresponding Decision Memo signed March 21, 2017. The Forest Service found the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation under NEPA pursuant to the Forest Service's NEPA regulations at 36 CFR Part 220 given that the Santa Barbara Mountain Communities Defense Zone Project is consistent with a category of excluded actions and that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would require further analysis. Additionally, the USFS determined that the use of the proposed equipment at the USFS Santa Barbara Range District office is categorically excluded from NEPA pursuant to 36 CFR 220.6(d)(3) that provides an exclusion for the repair and maintenance of administrative sties.

Date of Project Approval/Permit Issue Date: 12/1/2025

District Engineering/Permitting Contact Person:

Charlotte Mountain Email: MountainC@sbcapcd.org Phone: (805) 979-8314

District CEQA Contact Person:

Carly Barham Email: BarhamC@sbcapcd.org Phone: (805) 979-8337

Signature:

Alex Economou
Alex Economou, Planning Division Manager

Date: 11/12/2025


Aeron Arlin Genet, Air Pollution Control Officer