

LANDSCAPE MATERIAL: COMBUSTIBLE MULCH

In April 2024, the New Jersey Fire Code was updated to prohibit the use of combustible landscape materials, such as bark nuggets, shredded wood, and other wood-based materials, within 18 inches of buildings with a combustible exterior or portions of buildings, such as decks or porches, built with combustible materials.

“The regulations were adopted for the safety of residents, occupants of buildings, and first responders. Fires originating from ignited mulch have resulted in significant property damage, injuries, and deaths and compelled regulators to include these provisions in the 2018 International Fire Code,” said State Fire Marshal and Division of Fire Safety Director Richard J. Mikutsky.

The regulation applies to all buildings under the jurisdiction of the State Fire Prevention Code. The update does not apply to owner-occupied, one- or two-family, or attached single-family dwellings used exclusively for dwelling purposes.

Section 305.6 prohibits combustible landscape materials in the following situations:

- Within 18 inches of any building or structure with combustible components or trim with less than 3 feet clearance from grade
- Within 18 inches of a deck, porch, balcony, or other portion of a building constructed of combustible material
- Within 18 inches of a designated smoking area defined in section 30.2 1.

Section 305.6 provides the following exceptions:

- Live plant material such as shrubs, flowers, and trees, provided that they are not located within 18 inches of the building or structure or beneath a combustible overhang with less than 6 feet of clearance.
- Buildings made of noncombustible material.
- Fire-resistant mulch.

Please review the [Department of Community Affairs' Notice on the Use of Mulch Around Combustible Building Materials](#).

The effective date for compliance is April 15, 2025. The Safety Director recommends that building owners survey the exterior of buildings for combustible components below 3 feet high and for combustible mulch within 18 inches of the building. If both conditions are found, owners should make the needed corrections, such as replacing the mulch with stone or fire-resistant mulch.