

## Mapping compulsory brush clearing zones and strips.

The French Forestry Code requires landowners to clear the vegetation surrounding their buildings and accesses. Online maps indicate who is affected and where the limits of their responsibility lie.



Figure 1. Compulsory brush clearing strips around building and access road.  
Author: Mairie de Saint Christol lez Alès. | © Mairie de Saint Christol lez Alès, ©.

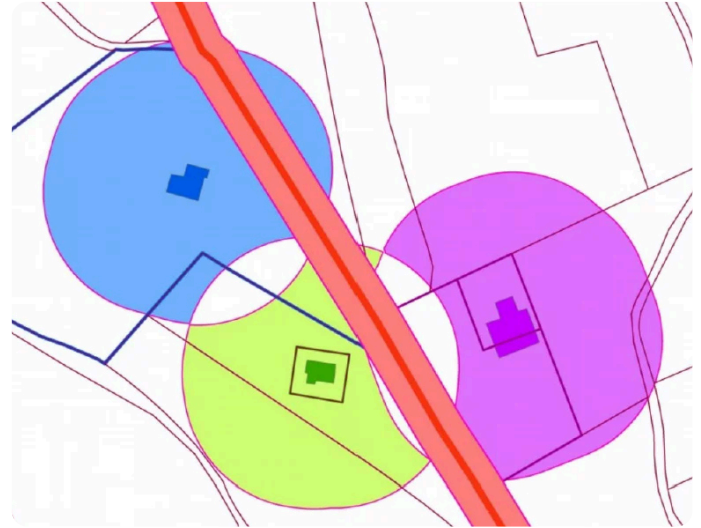


Figure 2. Determining who is responsible for brush clearing can become very complex when building strips overlap with each other and with those of public roads.  
Author: Guide technique – Les obligations légales de débroussaillage.  
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### /// Context ///

As a wildfire prevention measure, under the French Forestry Code, landowners in departments at high risk of wildfires, and within or less than 200 m away from forests, are required to clear the vegetation around their buildings in a buffer strip 50 m wide, and 10 m on either side of access roads (Figure 1). Brush clearing involves reducing all types of biomass (tall grass, branches, bushes and trees) to break the vertical and horizontal fuel continuity and reduce the intensity of a fire approaching a property. Methods include felling and pruning trees or shrubs, and removing cutting residues. In France, this regulation is known as **Compulsory Brush Clearing** (Obligations Légales de Débroussaillage, **OLD** in French). Brushing around buildings is compulsory by 1 July each year and must respect the technical criteria set by the town council or prefecture, published in the Local Town Planning Scheme.

Owners needing to clear beyond their own land must inform the neighbouring owners and request their permission to enter their property. The neighbours must grant the permit within a month, and if they do not, they will be responsible for the clearing. If the owners are unwilling or unable to clear the surrounding area by themselves, they can hire a forest works company. Town

**Self-defence against wildfire with Compulsory Brush Clearing strips require precise mapping for their implementation.**

**Landowners in départements at high risk of forest fires are required to clear the vegetation around their buildings, if located less than 200 m away from forests, in a buffer strip 50 m wide.**

councils are responsible for monitoring the execution of the clearing. Controls are carried out without prior notification, and failure to properly implement OLD may result in fines.

These requirements can create complex situations for landowners to assess:

1. **whether they have an obligation to clear or not,**
2. if so, **what are the boundaries of clearing under their responsibility,** and
3. **what the final state of the vegetation should be** (as technical clearing criteria vary between departments based on local context).

Landowners can contact the town council or the prefecture to learn about the technical clearing criteria in force in their department. However, it can be challenging for them to determine if their property is affected and which area of the strip they are responsible for clearing, because when this regulation came into force, no map was published showing the location of the affected areas. Such cartography is also necessary for town councils to monitor the execution of the OLD (Figure 2).

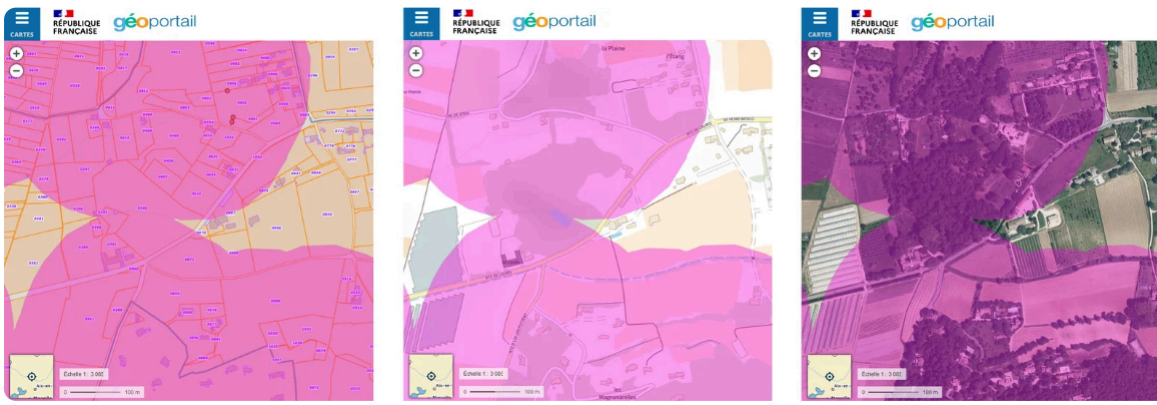


Figure 3. In Géoportail, OLD zones can be combined with other cartography (from left to right: cadastral plots, cartographic map, aerial photos).  
Author: Géoportail  
© Institut Géographique National.

### /// Solution for a Resilient Future ///

Three complementary sources of information for landowners and town councils answer the three questions above:

#### 1. Whether landowners have an obligation to clear or not

The [When is brush clearance compulsory?](#) webpage, in addition to explaining the Compulsory Brush Clearing regulation (OLD) in a language understandable to landowners, lists the departments that must comply with the OLD. However, a property is not affected by OLD if the buildings and access roads are more than 200 m away from forests. The Informative zoning of Compulsory Brush Clearing and [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) map the areas affected by OLD.

The [Informative zoning of Compulsory Brush Clearing](#) map (hosted and published by the National Institute of Geographic and Forestry Information), in Géoportail, was the first to be developed. Géoportail is a comprehensive web mapping service provided by the French government that publishes maps and aerial photographs from over 90 sources for France. This map can be combined with any other cartographic layers in Géoportail (Figure 3).

[OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) was created by the private company Optim.aize. It is a mapping web service exclusively focused on Compulsory Brush Clearing cartography. On both sites, users can enter an address and check whether it is in an area affected by OLD.

#### 2. What are the boundaries of clearing under their responsibility

Only [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) can answer this question. While [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) shows the 50-m strip around each building affected by an OLD, Géoportail only maps the areas covered by an OLD (Figure 4).

[OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) maps strips affected by the OLD scheme based on the current prefectural decrees and orders. Magellium, a company specialized in GIS and cartography, conducted data analysis and generated

### Making explicit an implicit complex cartography.

### OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR maps strips affected by the OLD scheme based on the current prefectural decrees and orders.

cartography based on this information. The website eases the access and use of these cartographic representations. It also aims to aid local authorities in the implementation and monitorisation of the OLD.

The map displays, over a background of aerial photos, the vectorial layers for buildings, cadastral plots, and forests. Certain wooded areas less than 4 ha may not be visible on the map even though they are covered by OLD. This is due to difficulties in identifying certain forests, heaths, and thickets from photographic and/or digital data, and the reliability of these areas cannot be guaranteed. It is necessary to update these forested areas as regulations and forest cover evolve.

The map can be accessed using a laptop, tablet or smartphone. If the device has GPS, it can also locate the user's position on the map. Users can browse the map or search for a specific address using the search bar. Clicking on the searched building will tell the user if the property is affected by OLD and, if so, it will show the boundaries of the 50-m strip and the total surface area to be cleared (in m<sup>2</sup>) and the boundaries of the cadastral plots. The user can also view a wider 100-m strip, a some town councils require this clearing width.

If the town council has subscribed to a premium plan with [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#), the area of the strip is displayed in two categories: non-forested areas (e.g. gardens) in yellow and forested areas in red, and their respective surface areas are given. In addition, the cadastral reference numbers of the plots are shown (Figure 5). Data is open access and available for download.

[OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) also provides information on OLD common to all French departments, including legal obligations, methods of clearing around buildings and roads, shared responsibilities when the 50-m strip overlaps with other tenants' land (private or public), and a calendar of possible actions.



### 3. What the final state of the vegetation should be

The French Forestry Code dictates OLD technical brushing criteria (minimal distance between the house and trees, minimal distance between trees, minimal the height of pruning, etc.) for some French departments, while others have their own set of technical criteria. The [When is brush clearance compulsory?](#) webpage, in addition to explaining the Compulsory Brush Clearing (OLD, in French) in a language understandable to landowners and providing a list of the French

Figure 4. Left: OLD as seen in Géoportail (pink areas indicate zones within an OLD). Right: OLD in [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) (yellow and red areas show 50-m strip). Author: Left: Géoportail. Right: [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#). © Institut Géographique National (left) and Optim.aize (right).

departments which, being in a fire risk zone, must comply with the OLD, allows individuals to contact the municipalities concerned to find out the technical criteria for clearing, or to obtain them directly from the website of the municipality or the departmental prefecture.

## /// Always Moving Forward ///

[OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) is adding new features to improve communication with the public on the risk of forest fires. Three new layers have been added in 2024. The drought warnings decreed, showing areas where drought conditions increase the severity of wildfires; the total area burnt since 2014, by municipality; and the average number of wildfires per year, by municipality.

It is appropriate for councils to subscribe to the premium plan. Currently, the premium plan shows the cadastral reference numbers of the plots under the selected strip: this facilitates the traceability of brushing responsibilities between landowners. However, the cadastral reference numbers can be obtained from the cadastral layer in Géoportail. The premium map also shows the surface

area of a strip divided into non-forest and forest: this is crucial for budgeting the cost of brush clearing, because while the cost of clearing a garden, grassland or meadow may be minimal, the cost of clearing a forest or woodland is much higher. Neighbours on the same housing estate can share the cost of brush clearing if they decide not to carry out the work themselves. Currently, [OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR](#) only maps the strips around buildings, but not along access roads. This is a possible feature to be added.

Optim.aize will offer two additional plans. The AI plan will provide the weekly fire weather index for forest areas, and the moisture level of the vegetation. The Analytics

**Integration of different layers of information to have a more comprehensive wildfire risk assessment.**

**OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR is adding new features to improve communication with the public on the risk of forest fires.**

plan will provide statistics and data visualisation for OLD at municipal, departmental, regional and national levels.

OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR and the Informative zoning of Compulsory Brush Clearing layer in Géoportail are both used by forest managers in integrated fire management plans.



Figure 5. OLD strip (non-forest in yellow, forest in red) around a building, with cadastral reference numbers of the plots, as seen in OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR.  
Author: OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR. | © Optim.aize

## Further information

- Feux de forêt et de végétation : avant l'été, pensez à débroussailler! <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/feux-de-foret-et-de-vegetation-avant-lete-pensez-debroussailler> (Accessed 22 August 2024) (In French)
- Dans quel cas le débroussaillage est-il obligatoire ? <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F33298> (Accessed 28 August 2024) (In French)
- Zonage informatif des obligations légales de débroussaillage (in Géoportail). <https://www.geoportail.gouv.fr/donnees/debroussaillage> (Accessed 28 August 2024) (In French)
- OÙDÉBROUSSAILLER.FR. <https://www.oudebroussailler.fr/> (Accessed 28 August 2024) (In French)
- Délégation à la Protection de la Forêt Méditerranéenne & Office National des Forêts. 2019. Guide technique – Les obligations légales de débroussaillage (OLD). URL: <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/telecharger/94123> (In French)

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