State of California
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

California State Transportation Agency

Memorandum

Making Conservation a California Way of Life.

To: DISTRICT DIRECTORS
DEPUTY DISTRICT DIRECTORS,
MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

Date: May 17, 2017

File: 413

From: KEITH ROBINSON
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Subject: GUIDELINES FOR VISIBILITY IMPROVEMENT REQUESTS (VIRs)

Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. issued Executive Order B-40-17 on April 10, 2017 terminating the January 17, 2014 Drought State of Emergency, for all counties in California except the counties of Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Tuolumne.

This memo transmits revised guidelines for managing Visibility Improvement Request (VIR) encroachment permit requests. These guidelines will replace guidelines described in the VISIBILITY IMPROVEMENT REQUEST DURING DECLARED DROUGHTS memo, dated September 17, 2014, and supersede guidelines for VIRs in the current Encroachment Permits Manual.

Executive Order B-37-16, Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life, remains in full force. This Executive Order strives to reduce wasteful water use. Pruning trees and other vegetation often stimulates a rapid flush of growth, requiring additional water by the plant. To minimize excessive water needs by vegetation and in anticipation of future water shortages, the following guidelines have been developed for use in all California counties:

Guidelines for Visibility Improvement Requests (VIRs)

1. Visibility improvement modification shall not detract from appearance, compromise function, or adversely affect the maintainability or longevity of the vegetation. The intent is to maintain:
    a. Visibility of off-premise displays; and,
    b. Identity of on-premise displays adjacent to the freeway.
        i. Pruning or removal of vegetation to improve showroom visibility, such as improving views of showroom windows or exterior displays of merchandise or services, is not allowed.
        ii. Pruning or removal of vegetation to improve visibility to other features or residential development, including pruning to improve views to or from the highway, is not allowed.

2. Work shall be performed in accordance with the guidelines of the International Society of Arboriculture - current ANSI A300 Standards.
3. Frequent light pruning of vegetation is the preferred method of achieving visibility improvement to maintain healthy vegetation. Pruning shall not disfigure or compromise the plant's health.
4. Removal of more than 15% of any tree's canopy is not allowed within a 12-month time period, nor more than 25% during any 24-month period.
5. Only one pruning per each 12-month period will be allowed at each location.
6. Supplemental water shall be applied to pruned trees as recommended by the District Landscape Architect or Landscape Specialist. To conserve domestic potable water, water must be either recycled or non-potable. Comply with the requirements of non-potable and recycled water use in Section 17 "Watering" of the Standard Specifications.
7. For off- premise displays or on-premise business establishments on Native American Reservations, Caltrans may issue permits for visibility improvement pruning according to these guidelines.
8. Pruning will only be allowed during a horticulturally appropriate time of year, based upon the tree species, solar exposure (to prevent sunscald), climate zone, and biological constraints (endangered species, nesting birds, etc.). Pruning to maintain visibility is best performed in the late spring, or following the first flush of growth. The District Landscape Maintenance Specialist will evaluate and specify in the permit the recommended time to prune.
9. Bonding or a cash deposit may be required.
10. State agencies are required to preserve and protect native oak woodlands whenever Blue, Engelmann, Valley, or Coast Live Oak trees exist (Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 17, September 1989). Applicants for VIRs shall contact the District Landscape Architect or Landscape Specialist prior to submitting a VIR request if these oak species are proposed for pruning.
11. Place mulch beneath pruned trees. Mulch must be 4-inches deep, not touch the trunk of the tree, and extend 5-feet beyond the outer edge of the tree canopy (drip-line). Do not place mulch in drainage ditches, on paved areas, or closer than 5-feet of the paved roadway edge. The District Landscape Architect or Landscape Specialist, if prohibited by existing site conditions may grant an exception to the requirement for mulch.

For questions regarding this memorandum you may contact:

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