

# Code Enforcement 101

## What is it?

The Sand Springs Fire Department's Neighborhood Services Division uses code enforcement to seek correction of public nuisances as defined by City Ordinances and State Statutes. A public nuisance is generally defined as a condition that affects the community's health, safety and welfare. Some of the most common public nuisances are high grass, trash accumulations, and unsecured or dilapidated buildings. A private nuisance, which is not enforceable by the city, generally only affects adjoining properties such as improperly installed fences or trees that overhang a neighbor's house.

## How is it done?

In Sand Springs, code enforcement has civil and criminal tools available to seek correction of public nuisances. Through ordinances and statutes, the City can enter onto private property to abate public nuisances. All costs for doing such work can be assessed as a lien against the property co-equal to its taxes. Inspectors can also issue criminal citations through Municipal Court. Each day a violation continues to exist represents a separate offense. Currently, the City uses both a citizen complaint process and observations by personnel in the field to initiate code enforcement cases. In most cases, public nuisance issues are resolved informally by verbal contact, door hanger or informal letter.

## What to look for?

**High Grass and Weeds:** The most common public nuisance, high grass and weeds is generally defined as uncared for vegetation that exceeds 12 inches in height, gives off unpleasant odors, creates a traffic or fire hazard, or is otherwise hazardous to the public (such as large accumulations of poison ivy or sumac). As a general rule, high grass must cover about half the property to be considered a public nuisance.

**Trash Accumulations:** This includes any unhealthful items such as garbage, but also includes debris or other uncared for items such as tree limbs and brush, furniture, and old appliances. Toys in common use in a yard are generally not considered to be a public nuisance.

**Unsecured, Deteriorated or Dilapidated Buildings:** Vacant buildings can represent attractive dangers to neighborhoods. All ground-level doors and windows to vacant buildings must be secured. Buildings that have deteriorated components such as staircases or decks can have those components declared a public nuisance and abated. Buildings that are in a significant state of disrepair represent collapse hazards or have been vacant for long periods of time can be demolished by the City.

## **What About Junked or Inoperable Vehicles?**

The City of Sand Springs has a separate ordinance that makes it unlawful to keep an inoperable vehicle in open view upon private or public property. Generally, inspectors look for vehicles on private property that have significant components missing or damaged such as body parts, engines, or tires and wheels. A currently unlicensed vehicle can be considered inoperable by city ordinance. However, as a general rule, there needs to be other indications of inoperability, or other issues such as being parked in a yard or on a sidewalk, before actions would be taken upon private property. Parking such vehicles on the street is cause in itself for action. The street does not serve as a parking lot for vehicles that are physically or legally incapable of being operated.

If a vehicle remains inoperable upon public or private property for more than seven days (168 hours), it may be subject to towing and impoundment. Vehicle owners or property owners could also be subject to criminal citations.

## **What are zoning violations?**

The City's Zoning Code provides regulations on what activities can occur in residential, commercial or industrial areas. Enforcement is generally done through a criminal citation process or a civil action in District Court. Some of the most common violations include businesses operating in a residential area, construction of buildings or carports in required yards, parking vehicles in the yard, and the parking of inoperable vehicles in a yard adjacent to a public street.

## **How can you help?**

**Help Wanted:** The Neighborhood Services Division has limited staff for code enforcement. Responsible citizens are encouraged to serve as our eyes and ears. If you see a public nuisance condition in your neighborhood – report it. All reports are logged into the City's code enforcement database and will be investigated. Reporting parties can remain anonymous.

**How to Make a Report:** The most common way to report public nuisances is by telephone. You can call **(918) 246-2574** during regular business hours. You can also e-mail reports to [info@sandspringsok.org](mailto:info@sandspringsok.org). The most critical information needed is the correct address where the public nuisance is occurring, what the public nuisance is, and where it is located on the property.

**Don't Go It Alone:** Public nuisances result from all sorts of circumstances. People with public nuisances on their property can become agitated if approached about them. Let the City address these matters.

**Remember:** Ugliness is not a public nuisance. Neighbors who paint their houses in distasteful colors or display unusual yard ornaments are not public nuisance violators. ALSO, subdivision covenants are enforceable as a civil matter by property owners within the subdivision and are not public nuisances enforceable by the City.