
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1143
Author: Bennett (D)
Amended: 4/23/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 15-0, 6/24/25
AYES: Padilla, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Choi, Dahle, Hurtado,
Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber
Pierson

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/8/25
AYES: Limón, Seyarto, Allen, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State Fire Marshal: home hardening certification program

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill requires the State Fire Marshal's (SFM) Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Requires the SFM to develop and make available on its internet website a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Fire Safety Building Standards Compliance training intended for use in the training of local building officials, builders, and fire service personnel, as specified.

- 2) Requires the SFM to develop and update a WUI Products listing of products and construction assemblies that comply with prescribed regulations regarding building in a WUI area.

This bill:

- 1) Requires, on or before January 1, 2027, the SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program that identifies home hardening measures, including defensible space, that can be implemented during renovation or property improvement projects, or both, to substantially reduce the risk of loss during a fire and bring existing building stock into alignment with provisions adopted in the California Building Code, as specified.
- 2) Authorizes the SFM to expend funds from the Building Standards Administration Special Revolving Fund (BSA Fund), upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the purposes of developing the home hardening certification program.

Background

Author Statement. According to the Author's office, "California's wildfire destruction has reached a tipping point. As the wildfires in Southern California have shown fires are now sweeping into urban areas in new, more intense and uncontrollable ways. We must do more to ensure that homes are more than just superficially hardened, and take a holistic, science-based, approach. AB 1143 moves us towards an evidence based approach by directing the State Fire Marshal's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a certification program that provides homeowners a voluntary option for a holistic home hardening approach."

California's Wildfire Mitigation Program. AB 38 (Wood, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019) requires the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program to encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting and to facilitate vegetation management, as specified. Known as the CWMP, this effort encourages cost-effective wildfire resilience measures to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, public buildings, and public spaces. Mitigation measures such as home hardening,

vegetation management, defensible space, and other fuel modification activities provide neighborhood and community-wide benefits against wildfire.

SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee. The SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee (WMAC) provides a means of communication between the SFM, representatives of industry, state agencies, the fire service, and other stakeholders. WMAC provides a forum for addressing wildfire preparedness and mitigation issues of statewide concern, share best practices, seek comments and specific input on programs and technical issues, and inform local agencies and the public of applicable new laws and regulations. WMAC acts in an advisory capacity on the programs and activities of the Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division and is chaired by the SFM.

This bill requires the WMAC to develop a home hardening certification program that identifies home hardening measures, including defensible space, which can be implemented during renovation or property improvement projects, or both, to substantially reduce the risk of loss during a fire and bring existing building stock into alignment with the provisions adopted in the California Building Code, as specified.

Defensible Space and Home Hardening. Defensible space is the front line for defending a property against wildfire. Creating and maintaining defensible space around your home can dramatically increase a home's chance of surviving a wildfire and improves the safety of firefighters defending a property. Defensible space, in combination with home hardening, will make a home ignition resistant from embers, radiant heat, and flame impingement. Existing law requires occupied structures within a high fire hazard severity zone to maintain a firebreak of at least 30 feet from the structure and additional vegetation management for fire protection for up to 100 feet from the structure.

Chapter 7A of the California Building Standards Code. Chapter 7A is California's WUI building code. As such, this chapter of the building code establishes the minimum standards applicable to building materials, systems and/or assemblies used in the exterior design and construction of new buildings located within a WUI Fire Area for the protection of life and property. Chapter 7A was initially adopted in 2008 and has undergone multiple revisions as part of the iterative code development process, integrating the most recent insights and scientific advancements from technical experts in the field.

The SFM's Building Materials Listing (BML) Program. The BML Program started out as a way to make sure fire alarms were tested and approved before hitting the California market. But over the years, it's grown into a much broader safety check, now covering everything from roof coverings and wall assemblies to hardware and other building materials. To get listed, products must undergo rigorous testing in labs accredited by the SFM. The listings themselves are a vital resource for local building departments, architects, engineers, contractors, and fire professionals. To make things easier, the SFM also puts out a detailed handbook highlighting which products meet Chapter 7A's wildfire safety standards.

Safer From Wildfires. In 2022, the California Department of Insurance (CDI) rolled out its "Safer from Wildfires" framework, a first-of-its-kind regulation requiring insurance companies to offer discounts to homeowners and businesses that take specific wildfire mitigation steps. The framework was developed in coordination with Cal FIRE, OES, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, and the California Public Utility Commission.

Insurance companies must update their rate filings to reflect these new safety standards and offer transparent risk information. That includes sharing a property's wildfire risk score with consumers and giving them the rights to appeal that score if they believe it is inaccurate. Under the regulation, the more "Safer from Wildfires" steps a consumer takes, the more likely they may be able to save on their insurance.

Once fully implemented, this approach should help shift the insurance market toward rewarding resilience, giving homeowners a clearer path to both lower premiums and safer homes. Some of the steps property owners can take under the "Safer from Wildfires" framework include:

- a. Class-A fire rated roof.
- b. Five-foot ember resistant zones.
- c. Ember- and fire-resistant vents.
- d. Non-combustible six inches at the bottom of exterior walls.
- e. Enclosed eaves.
- f. Upgraded windows.
- g. Cleared vegetation, weeds, and debris from under decks.
- h. Removal of combustible sheds and other buildings to a distance of 30 feet.
- i. Defensible space compliance.

Building Standards Administration Special Revolving Fund. The BSA Fund is intended for use by the Building Standards Commission, HCD, and/or the SFM – upon appropriation by the Legislature – in the development of building standards, with an emphasis on the development, adoption, publication, updating, and educational efforts associated with green building standards. Each city and county in the state is required to collect a fee on permit applicants, in the amount of \$4 per every \$100,000 in valuation to be deposited into the BSA Fund.

This bill authorizes the SFM to expend funds from the BSA Fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the purposes of developing the home hardening certification program.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 514 (Cabaldon, 2025) repeals the sunset provisions related to CAL FIRE’s statewide program to support its defensible space inspection and home hardening assessment and education efforts, including its training pilot program for qualified organizations and individual volunteers, as provided. This bill also requires the CAL FIRE to create a standardized framework to accredit local governments, fire safe councils, and neighborhoods for following wildfire prevention practices, and to publish certain information, including a list of all accredited entities, on its website. (Pending in the Assembly Appropriations Committee)

AB 1457 (Bryan, 2025) requires CAL FIRE’s defensible space and home hardening training program to additionally provide training consistent with the “Home Ignition Zone/Defensible Space Inspector” course plan, established by the SFM, and deletes the January 1, 2026, sunset date on that program. This bill is referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee. (Pending on the Senate Floor)

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, CAL FIRE reports costs of approximately \$2.31 million in year one and \$2.22 million in year two and ongoing to develop and implement the certification program (Building Standards Administration Special Revolving (BSA) Fund and General Fund).

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

American Wood Council
California Apartment Association
California Fire Chiefs Association

California Legislative Central Coast Caucus
California Professional Firefighters
California Special Districts Association
City of Arcadia
City of Goleta
City of Los Alamitos
City of Thousand Oaks
City of Ventura
East Bay Wildfire Coalition of Governments
Fire Districts Association of California
Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of California, INC.
James Hardie
League of California Cities
Marin County Council of Mayors and Councilmembers
NV5

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of the bill, the California Professional Firefighters write that, “[d]efensible space and home hardening measures are critically important tools in wildfire preparedness for areas that are at high risk of fire. By keeping the areas immediately surrounding structures free of combustible materials such as dead plants, debris, wooden furniture, and other items, as well as keeping trees and shrubs separated both from each other and the structure, a fire can be significantly slowed or even stopped. Following major wildfires, it is often the case that homes that had properly implemented defensible space were left untouched by the fire while others around them had burned. This not only protects the property and the safety of the people living there, but also reduces the burden on firefighters who are responding to the disaster.”

Further, “AB 1143 would direct the State Fire Marshal’s Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to create a home hardening certification program with defined home hardening measures, allowing homeowners and developers to implement approved techniques during construction or renovation. A set and recognized set of standards to follow would greatly streamline the process of implementing home hardening standards in home construction and renovation, encouraging their adoption at a much higher rate throughout the state.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

Prepared by: Brian Duke / G.O. / (916) 651-1530
8/30/25 15:27:32

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