

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 1934 (Bennett) – As Amended March 25, 2026

SUBJECT: State Fire Marshal: home hardening certification program implementation plan

SUMMARY Requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the OSFM to establish the Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) to provide a public forum to solicit and consider public input on programs and activities pursuant to this article and to advise the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation in developing and implementing programs and activities. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 4209.4)
- 2) Authorizes the OSFM to allow certification of contractors who conduct defensible space, home hardening, fuel reduction, roadside clearance, and other contracting activities for wildfire resiliency efforts and who have completed the training program. (Health and Safety Code 13159.5 (b))
- 3) Mandates in the California Building Standards Code strict, fire-resistant construction standards for new buildings, additions, and renovations in Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fire areas and requires ignition-resistant materials for roofs, eaves, exterior walls, and windows to protect structures from ember intrusion and radiant heat. (Chapter 7A of Part 2 California Code of Regulations Title 24)
- 4) Requires the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to enter into a joint powers agreement (JPA) with CAL FIRE develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program (WMP) to (1) encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting that creates fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings, and (2) vegetation management, the creation and maintenance of defensible space, and other fuel modification activities that provide neighborhood or communitywide benefits against wildfire. (Government Code (GC) 8654.4)
- 5) Requires the JPA to develop a scoping methodology to prioritize the provision of financial assistance to communities in eligible areas in very high fire hazard severity zones (VHFHSZs) in the local responsibility area (LRA) and in any FHSZs in the state responsibility area (SRA). (GC 8654.7)
- 6) Requires the SFM, in consultation with CAL FIRE and the Director of Housing and Community Development, to identify building retrofits and structure hardening measures eligible for financial assistance under the WMP that are both cost-effective and provide for appropriate site or structure fire risk reduction. (GC 8654.5)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Requires, on or before January 1, 2028, the Advisory Committee to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program that identifies home hardening measures, including defensible space, that can be voluntarily 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 Standards Code.
- 2) Requires the Advisory Committee to provide recommendations that include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a) The agency or entity that should manage and implement the implementation plan for the home hardening certification program;
 - b) Identifying the qualifications necessary for individuals tasked with inspecting a home and confirming its compliance with the home hardening standards established in the implementation plan for the home hardening certification program;
 - c) The length of time that a certification is valid; and,
 - d) Implementation steps.
- 3) Requires, on or before January 1, 2028, the Advisory Committee to provide a report to the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management, Senate Committee on Emergency Management, Assembly Committee on Natural Resources, and Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water on its findings and recommendations pursuant to this bill.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:**1) Author's statement:**

California's wildfire destruction has reached a tipping point. We must do more to ensure that homes are more incentivized to effectively fire harden their home. A trusted, state authorized, certification program creates the foundation we need to build a series of incentives designed to motivate homeowners to make this valuable investment in the survivability of their home. AB 1934 moves us towards an evidence-based approach. It directs the State Fire Marshal to develop a voluntary, home hardened certification program that we can then tie incentives to.

- 2) **Defensible space.** Defensible space is the buffer created between a building on a property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it helps protect structures from catching fire. A 2019 analysis done by CAL FIRE of the relationship between defensible space compliance and destruction of structures wildfires in 2017-2018 concluded that the odds of a structure being destroyed by wildfire were roughly five times higher for noncompliant structures compared to compliant ones.

- 3) **Home hardening.** Home hardening includes vegetation management compliance and building materials used to resist the intrusion of flames or embers projected by a wildland fire. It can be applied to new construction or for retrofitting an older home. Home hardening considers the relationship between a structure and its exposure to nearby combustible features such as vegetation, vehicles, accessory buildings, or even miscellaneous structures like a fence.

California's wildfire building code (known colloquially by its citation reference as Chapter 7A) went into effect in 2008 and mandates fire-resistant siding, tempered glass, vegetation management, and ignition-resistant roofs, standards for vents, decks, under eaves, siding, windows, gutters, vents for attics and crawlspaces designed to resist embers and flames. These standards, which are periodically updated, have been shown to work. An analysis by the Sacramento Bee showed that approximately 51% of the 350 single-family homes built after 2008 in the path of the Camp Fire were undamaged. By contrast, only 18% of the 12,100 homes built prior to 2008 escaped damage. Factors that can cause post-2008 homes to combust include not having adequate defensible space and proximity to neighboring non-fire hardened homes.

According to comments from CAL FIRE Chief Berlant at the February 26 Budget Subcommittee #4 hearing, there are roughly five million homes in the WUI, and CAL FIRE analysis shows that 90% of those homes were built before today's building codes went into effect in 2008.

Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-4-25 issued January 7, 2025, states that "efforts to rebuild should include measures to increase community resilience, harden homes, and ensure defensible space to build resilience to future wildfires, to the greatest extent practicable."

- 4) **Existing home hardening financing program.** CAL FIRE's Home Hardening Program (Program) was created pursuant to AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019, to assist low- and moderate-income residents in high fire risk areas by providing funding for safety improvements and defensible space. The Program is currently in the demonstration phase, being piloted in three select areas, Whitmore in Shasta County, Dulzura in San Diego County, and Kelseyville-Riviera in Lake County. New pilot communities are also being considered for Tuolumne and El Dorado Counties. The lessons learned working with these pilot communities are being used to refine the Program and build the Program framework before expanding to additional areas within demonstration counties, and ultimately across the state.

The JPA established pursuant to AB 38 is required to report to the Legislature by July 1, 2028, regarding the implementation of the wildfire mitigation financial assistance program. Even if this Program is applied statewide, it is notably not a certification program.

- 5) **This bill.** AB 1934 is a reintroduction of AB 1143 (Bennett, 2025), which proposed requiring the 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. AB 1934 would similarly require the creation of a home hardening certification program that identifies a combination of products, construction

assemblies, home hardening techniques, and defensible space measures. This bill also requires the SFM to convene an Advisory Committee to provide recommendations.

Governor Newsom vetoed AB 1143, noting the efforts being implemented under AB 38 (Wood), and said multiple measures intending to build on those efforts created a lack of harmony between these efforts, which, he cited, would result in conflicting outcomes and confusion for consumers, insurance companies, local governments, and emergency responders. He encouraged the Legislature to “revisit this important issue next year and work collaboratively to navigate the different approaches to setting hardening standards, including determining the responsible state entity.”

The author’s intent with AB 1934 is to establish a consistent framework that makes it easy for homeowners to know exactly what steps they need to take for their home to be considered hardened, based on the best science available. Currently, homeowners can only rely on private certifications; AB 1934 begins the work of establishing a statewide framework.

6) **Double referral.** This bill was heard in the Assembly Emergency Management Committee on March 23 and approved 6-0.

7) **Related legislation:**

AB 1960 (Bennett) Authorizes any group of residents to apply to CAL FIRE for identified cohesive fire community status, defined as a community that has reached 50% of homes certified by any home hardening certification program approved by the SFM on or before June 1, 2027. This bill is referred to the Assembly Emergency Management Committee.

AB 1964 (Bennett) Requires the SFM to, on or before January 1, 2030, compile a report concerning homes in moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones in state and local responsibility areas and report to the Legislature. This bill is referred to the Assembly Emergency Management Committee.

AB 1971 (Bennett) Excludes from the definition of “newly constructed” and “new construction” the construction or reconstruction of home hardening retrofitting improvements, which the bill would define as the installation specified building materials and the establishment of defensible space, and requires the property owner to receive a home hardening certification. This bill is referred to the Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee.

AB 1986 (Bennett) Requires, upon request for a premium quote for residential property insurance, an insurer to provide a premium quote for the residential property that includes the price of insurance if the property is certified as “hardened” by a home hardening certification program established or approved by the SFM and a premium quote for the residential property in its current state. This bill is referred to the Assembly Insurance Committee.

SB 1076 (Pérez) Prohibits, on and after January 1, 2028, an admitted insurer that offers or sells residential property insurance in this state from reducing to offer, sell, or renew a policy of residential property insurance for an applicant or insured whose property meets minimum home hardening and wildfire mitigation standards, as established by the Insurance Commissioner by regulation. This bill has been referred to the Senate Insurance Committee.

AB 1143 (Bennett, 2025) 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 state building standards for wildland-urban interface areas. This bill was vetoed.

SB 541 (Cabaldon), Chapter 767, Statutes of 2025 Eliminated the sunset date on the statewide program to allow qualified entities to support and augment CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment; added nonprofit entities focused on wildfire resiliency and contractors who conduct specified wildfire resiliency activities to the list of qualified entities; and, authorized qualified entities to additionally assess compliance with defensible space requirements applicable to local responsibility areas.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Professional Firefighters
California State Association of Counties
Consumer Watchdog
Contra Costa County
Elevate California
James Hardie
League of California Cities
Matador Fire
Orange County Fire Authority
Rural County Representatives of California
Sierra Club

Opposition

None on file

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