

- 5) Requires the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to enter into a joint powers agreement (JPA) with CAL FIRE, until July 1, 2029, to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program (CWMP) to, among other things, encourage cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting to create fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings.
- 6) Specifies areas eligible for financial assistance under the CWMP to include areas located within fire hazard severity zones and any other lands designated by the JPA, as specified.
- 7) Requires the JPA to develop eligibility criteria for property owners, community organizations, and local governments that may receive financial assistance under the CWMP.

This bill:

- 1) Directs, on or before January 1, 2028, the WMAC 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 to substantially reduce the risk of loss during a fire and bring existing building stock into alignment with the California Building Standards Code.
- 2) Directs the WMAC to provide recommendations in the implementation plan that include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a) Multiple tiers of home hardening certification with at least one tier defined as ember resistant;
 - b) Identifying the qualifications necessary for individuals tasked with inspecting a home and confirming its compliance, as specified; and,
 - c) The length of time that a certification is valid.
- 3) Requires, by January 1, 2028, the WMAC to provide a report to the relevant policy committees of the Legislature on its findings and recommendations pursuant to this bill.
- 4) Directs, by January 1, 2029, the OSFM to establish and implement the certification program consistent with the home hardening certification recommendations in the WMAC's implementation plan.

Background

Author's statement. According to the author, "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."

Home hardening. According to CAL FIRE, home hardening is a method of utilizing construction features, building materials, and maintenance practices intended to increase a building and structure's resistance to ignition from fire exposure, including direct flame contact, radiant heat and embers. Home hardening includes using fire-resistant building materials, adopting safe landscaping practices, and implementing preventative measures to reduce fire risk and enhance property safety. CAL FIRE has information on its website relating to how various components of a home can be vulnerable to fire, whether it is the roof, gutters and vents or the exterior siding, windows, and/or a deck and fence, and provides recommendations to homeowners to minimize those risks.

Defensible space. The University of California Fire Network describes defensible space as the area adjacent to a structure where vegetation and other combustible materials are carefully located and maintained to provide defense from an approaching wildfire burning or to minimize the spread of a structure fire to wildlands or surrounding areas. The purposes of defensible space are to minimize fire pathways to the structure, reduce potential heat exposures to structure components, reduce the potential for embers to ignite materials adjacent to the structure, and provide a safe place for fire personnel to defend the structure and allow evacuation. Adequate defensible space acts as a barrier to slow or halt the progress of fire that would otherwise engulf a property.

Chapter 7A of the California Building Standards Code. Chapter 7A is California's WUI building code. This chapter 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 code development process to incorporate the most recent insights and scientific advancements from technical experts in the field.

The CWMP. AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019, directs Cal OES and CAL FIRE to jointly create and administer the CWMP to strengthen community-

level wildfire hardening. The program has leveraged hazard mitigation grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop a wildfire community hardening framework and establish pilot home hardening programs in socially vulnerable communities at high risk of wildfires in the counties of Lake, San Diego, Shasta, El Dorado, Tuolumne, and Siskiyou. The framework incorporates lessons learned from the pilot counties and is intended to be a living document that will be continuously updated throughout the duration of the CWMP.

The WMAC. The WMAC provides a forum for the OSFM, representatives of industry, state agencies, the fire service, and other stakeholders to address wildfire preparedness and mitigation issues of statewide concern, share best practices, seek comments and technical input on specific programs, 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 OSFM's Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation Division.

This bill requires the WMAC to develop a plan with recommendations for implementing a home hardening certification program by January 1, 2028, and further directs the OSFM to establish the certification program consistent with the WMAC's recommendations no later than January 1, 2029. As noted by the author, homeowners can only rely on private certifications currently when hardening their home and this bill seeks to begin the process of establishing a statewide certification framework.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 1960 (Bennett) of this session 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 OSFM on or before June 1, 2027. (Pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee)

AB 1964 (Bennett) of this session requires the OSFM 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. (Pending in the Senate Emergency Management Committee)

SB 1270 (Richardson) of this session would have expanded the CWMP to additional counties with the greatest combined risk of wildfire and social vulnerability. (Held in Senate Appropriations)

AB 1143 (Bennett) of 2025 was substantially similar to AB 1934. (Vetoed)

SB 616 (Rubio) of 2025 would have established the Community Hardening Commission as an independent entity within the Department of Insurance and required the Insurance Commissioner to convene the Commission to develop new wildfire community hardening standards to reduce fire risk and improve access to fire insurance. (Vetoed)

SB 190 (Dodd) Chapter 404, Statutes of 2019, requires the OSFM to develop a model defensible space program, online training related to building standards in the WUI, and a listing of products and construction assemblies that comply with fire safety building standards.

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

SUPPORT:

American Property Casualty Insurance Association
American Rainwater Catchment System Association
California Apartment Association
California Central Coast Caucus
California Fire Chiefs Association
California Professional Firefighters
California State Association of Counties
City of Orinda
City of Thousand Oaks
City of Yorba Linda
Consumer Watchdog
Contra Costa County
County of Monterey
Elevate California
Fire Aside
Fire Districts Association of California
Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara
International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials
League of California Cities
Little Hoover Commission
Matador Fire
Megafire Action
National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies
Pacific Association of Domestic Insurers
Personal Insurance Federation of California

Rural County Representatives of California
The Nature Conservancy
One individual

OPPOSITION:

None on file

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of the bill, the California State Association of Counties writes that, “California local governments support the establishment of a statewide home hardening certification program because it would provide a clear, science-based standard for reducing wildfire risk to existing homes, strengthening community resilience while helping residents make informed investments in safety. A uniform certification would also improve eligibility for insurance incentives; however, property-level and communitywide wildfire risk mitigation efforts still need to be accounted for in insurance rates and formalized in an update to the Safer from Wildfires regulations. By lowering structure loss during wildfires, home hardening ultimately protects lives and reduces the long-term public costs of disaster response and recovery.”

DUAL REFERRAL: Senate Emergency Management Committee and Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee