

---

# SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

---

**Bill No:** AB 1934 **Hearing Date:** July 1, 2026  
**Author:** Bennett  
**Version:** June 9, 2026 Amended  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Edith Hannigan

**Subject:** State Fire Marshal: home hardening certification program implementation plan

## SUMMARY

This bill would require, on or before January 1, 2028, the State Fire Marshal's Wildfire Mitigation 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 state building standards for wildland-urban interface areas

## BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

**Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department).** The Department, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§4113, 4114).

**Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM).** In the mid-1990s, the OSFM was moved from the State and Consumer Services Agency to the Department. The State Fire Marshal (SFM) is established as a Chief Deputy Director of Forestry and Fire Protection in the Department (Health and Safety Code (HSC) §13100). The mission of the OSFM is to "[protect] life and property through the development and application of fire prevention, engineering, training and education, and enforcement."

**Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee (WMAC).** The WMAC provides a public communication forum between the Department's 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 specific input on programs and technical issues, and inform local agencies and the public of applicable new laws and regulations. The WMAC is chaired by the SFM.

**Wildfires.** Wildfires in California have been increasing in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to public health, property, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

California's landscapes are among the most naturally fire-dependent on Earth. One study suggests that prior to 1800, approximately 4.5 million acres of the state burned annually. Native Americans were likely responsible for a significant portion of this

acreage. With colonization, many of these practices were significantly reduced or eliminated, fundamentally altering fire scope and intensity across the state.

Low-intensity fires have clear ecological benefits, such as creating habitat and assisting in the regeneration of certain species of plants and trees. Low-intensity fire also reduces surface fuel, which decreases future wildfire intensity.

A century of suppressing low-intensity fires, logging of older growth and more fire-resistant trees has increased the size and severity of California's fires. Climate change has also contributed to wildfire risk by reducing humidity and precipitation and increasing temperatures.

**Home hardening.** The Department and California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) entered into a joint powers agreement to administer a Wildfire Mitigation Financial Assistance Program, known as the California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP), that:

- 1) Encourages cost-effective structure hardening and retrofitting that creates fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings.
- 2) Facilitates vegetation management, the creation and maintenance of defensible space, and other fuel modification activities that provide neighborhood or communitywide benefits against wildfire (Government Code (GOV) §8654.4).

CWMP is required to submit a report to the Legislature by July 1, 2028 regarding the implementation of the program including:

- The cost effectiveness of the program, compared to similar programs.
- Evaluation of the overall risk mitigation achieved statewide.
- Information regarding barriers to completing the work.

Existing law sunsets CWMP on July 1, 2029.

**Existing law:**

- 1) Requires the OSFM to establish the WMAC to provide a public forum to solicit and consider public input on programs and activities pursuant to community wildfire preparedness and mitigation provisions and to advise the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation in developing and implementing programs and activities. (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 the Department to develop and administer the CWMP 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 fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) in the state responsibility area (SRA). (GC §8654.7)
- 6) Requires the SFM, in consultation with the Department 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)

## **PROPOSED LAW**

This bill would:

- 1) Require the WMAC, on or before January 1, 2028, to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program.
- 2) Require the WMAC to provide recommendations that include:
  - 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 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.
- 3) Require the WMAC to provide a report to the relevant policy committees of the Legislature on its findings and recommendations on or before January 1, 2028.
- 4) Require the SFM establish the certification and implement the certification program consistent with WMAC's recommendations.

## **ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT**

According to the author's office, "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."

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION**

None received.

**COMMENTS**

***Second committee of referral.*** This bill was double referred to this committee and the Committee on Emergency Management. This committee is the second committee of referral. This bill passed with a vote of 9-0 in Senate Emergency Management. Items discussed in this analysis under the purview of the Emergency Management Committee are included here for context and completeness only.

***If at first you don't succeed...*** AB 1934 is a reintroduction of AB 1143 (Bennett, 2025), which proposed requiring WMAC 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, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019), 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.”

**Related legislation**

AB 1960 (Bennett, 2026) authorizes the Department’s Wildfire Prevention Grants Program to fund activities that would benefit communities where a certain percentage of homes are certified as hardened against wildfires. This bill was heard in this Committee on June 23 and passed with a vote of 5-0. This bill is pending hearing in the Senate Emergency Management Committee.

SB 1270 (Richardson, 2026) would have required the CWMP to expand to additional counties. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1964 (Bennett, 2026) would require 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 pending hearing in the Senate Emergency Management Committee.

AB 1971 (Bennett, 2026) would have excluded from the definition of “newly constructed” and “new construction” the construction or reconstruction of home hardening retrofitting improvements, which the bill would have defined as the installation specified building materials and the establishment of defensible space, and would have required the property owner to receive a home hardening certification. This bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File.

AB 1143 (Bennett, 2025) would have required on or before January 1, 2027, the SFM's WMAC 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 the department 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.

**SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none****SUPPORT**

Arcsa International  
California Apartment Association  
California Fire Chiefs Association  
California Professional Firefighters  
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)  
City of Thousand Oaks  
City of Yorba Linda  
Consumer Watchdog  
Contra Costa County  
County of Monterey  
Elevate California  
Fire Districts Association of California  
Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara / California Department of Insurance  
International Association of Plumbing & Mechanical Officials  
James Hardie  
League of California Cities  
Little Hoover Commission  
Matador Fire  
Megafire Action  
Monterey; County of  
Orinda; City of  
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)  
Sierra Club

**OPPOSITION**

None Received

-- END --