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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

**Senator Henry Stern**

**Chair**

**2025 - 2026 Regular**

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**Bill No:** AB 1964 **Hearing Date:** 6/30/2026  
**Author:** Bennett  
**Version:** 5/18/2026 Amended  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Cassie Royce

**SUBJECT:** State Fire Marshal: home hardening

**SUMMARY:** Directs the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to develop, by January 1, 2028, home hardening standards to identify whether a home is sufficiently hardened against fire risks, as specified, and compile a report, by January 1, 2030, that estimates the number of homes in specified fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) that meet these home hardening standards or require additional home hardening.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the SFM within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to protect life and property through the development and application of fire prevention, engineering, training and education, and enforcement.
- 2) Requires the SFM to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high FHSZs based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas.
- 3) Requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to classify all lands within the state to determine areas in which the financial responsibility of preventing and suppressing fires is primarily the responsibility of the state. This is commonly referred to as the State Responsibility Area (SRA).
- 4) Excludes from the SRA land where local agencies, as specified, are responsible for fire protection, commonly referred to as the Local Responsibility Area.

- 5) Requires the SFM to develop and update a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) list of products and construction assemblies that comply with prescribed regulations regarding building in a WUI area.
- 6) 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.
- 7) Specifies areas eligible for financial assistance under the CWMP to include areas located within FHSZs and any other lands designated by the JPA, as specified.
- 8) 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 the SFM to develop home hardening standards to determine whether a home is sufficiently hardened to effectively reduce fire risk, as specified, by January 1, 2028.
- 2) Requires the SFM to compile a report, by January 1, 2030, concerning homes in moderate, high, and very high FHSZs in state and local responsibility areas that includes the following:
  - a) An estimate of the total number of homes located within each FHSZ and responsibility area.
  - b) An estimate of the number of homes that meet the home hardening standards developed pursuant to this bill and an estimate of the number of homes that require more home hardening to meet these standards in each responsibility area and county.
- 3) Requires the SFM to make the completed report available on its internet website and submit copies to the Legislature by July 1, 2030.

## Background

*Author's statement.* According to the author, "Wildfires in California are inevitable. As we continue to grapple with increasingly frequent and destructive

wildfires, it's imperative California understands where our resources need to be focused. AB 1964 requires the State Fire Marshal to conduct a survey on the number of homes in moderate, high, and very high Fire Hazard Severity Zones and are successfully fire hardened. With comprehensive data on the state of home hardening, California ensures its resources for hardening incentives go to the communities that need it most—ultimately protecting homes and giving us the best bang for our buck.”

*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.

*FHSZs.* The SFM is required to classify lands into FHSZs. Moderate, high, and very high FHSZs are based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors present, including areas where winds have been identified by CAL FIRE as a major cause of wildfire spread. FHSZ maps are developed using a science-based and field-tested model that assigns a hazard score based on the relevant factors that influence fire likelihood and fire behavior.

*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.

This bill directs the SFM to estimate and report on the number of homes across fire risk areas in California that would meet the home hardening standards developed pursuant to this bill to inform and prioritize home hardening efforts statewide.

**Prior/Related Legislation**

AB 1934 (Bennett) requires the OSFM’s Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop an implementation plan for a home hardening certification program, as specified. (Pending in Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee)

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

**SUPPORT:**

California Apartment Association  
Megafire Action  
The Nature Conservancy

**OPPOSITION:**

None on file

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** In support of the bill, Megafire Action writes that, “Without standardized definitions of what constitutes a hardened home, certification programs lack a common reference point. Without a statewide inventory, legislators and agencies cannot size appropriations, target interventions, or measure progress. AB 1964 addresses both critical gaps simultaneously. AB 1964 is the data and standards infrastructure that makes the broader home hardening policy ecosystem coherent in support of a more wildfire resilient California.”