SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1964 (Bennett) - State Fire Marshal: home hardening

Version: May 18, 2026
Urgency: No
Hearing Date: August 3, 2026
Policy Vote: E.M. 8 - 0
Mandate: No
Consultant: Janelle Miyashiro

Bill Summary: AB 1964 requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to develop standards to determine whether a home is sufficiently hardened against certain fire risks. AB 1964 also requires the OSFM to compile a report identifying how many homes in moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) meet these standards, and how many require further hardening, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:
- The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) estimates costs of $500,000 (General Fund) to purchase vendor data on homes within each FHSZ and responsibility area.
- Unknown costs for CAL FIRE to develop the home hardening standards and compile a report detailing the number of homes that meet these standards.

Background: *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.

Proposed Law:

- Requires the OSFM, by January 1, 2028, to develop home hardening standards that determine whether a home is sufficiently hardened to effectively reduce fire risk during an ember shower or when directly exposed to flames and radiant heat.

- Requires the OSFM, by January 1, 2030, to compile a report concerning homes in moderate, high, and very high FHSZs in state and local responsibility areas. Requires the report to include:
    - An estimate of the total number of homes located within each FHSZ and responsibility area.
    - An estimate of the number of homes that meet the OSFM's home hardening standards, and an estimate of the number of homes that require further hardening to meet these standards, in each responsibility area and county.
- Requires the OSFM, by July 1, 2030, to submit this report to the Legislature and post it on its website.

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