

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2075 (Bennett) – As Amended April 15, 2026

Policy Committee:	Natural Resources	Vote:	14 - 0
	Judiciary		12 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes new fire safety and equipment standards for a person operating an internal combustion engine in fire prone areas and requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (BOF) to adopt certain emergency regulations.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires BOF, for timber operations on timberland conducted by a timber operator, to adopt emergency regulations that (a) define the terms “operating area” and “point accessible in the event of a fire” in the forest practice rules and (b) define the necessary number and types of tools that may be used to extinguish ignitions in an area of operation.
- 2) Revises the conditions under which a person is prohibited from using or operating specified equipment from which a spark, fire, or flame may originate on certain lands without additionally maintaining at least one backpack pump-type fire extinguisher fully equipped and ready for use and a sufficient number of serviceable round point shovels with an overall length of not less than 46 inches so that each person at the operation is equipped to fight fire, within the operating area, at a point accessible in the event of fire.
- 3) Requires that these fire tools be no farther than 25 feet from the point of operation of the power saw or tool with unrestricted access for the operator from the point of operation.
- 4) Provides that these requirements do not apply to a person operating a motorized vehicle to work on, clear, or grade any land in or near specified lands during any time of the year when burning permits are required, and instead requires the person to have in or affixed to the motor vehicle and ready for immediate use one serviceable round point shovel and one fully equipped fire extinguisher.
- 5) Defines “person” as a natural person, partnership, firm, association, corporation, limited liability company, or other legal entity.

FISCAL EFFECT:

One-time costs of an unknown amount, ranging from minor and absorbable to potentially in excess of \$150,000 (General Fund or special fund), for BOF to adopt emergency regulations as required by this bill. The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, which houses BOF, did not have a cost estimate available at the time of the writing of this analysis.

COMMENTS:1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

With climate change increasing the frequency and intensity of wildfires, California needs clarity regarding who to hold accountable when an accidental fire breaks out during an outdoor operation. AB 2075 clarifies fire safety standards during operations on or near any forest, brush, or grass-covered land and ensures companies performing such activities clearly know what they can be held liable for in the event a fire occurs.

2) **Background.** To ensure that a small fire does not become a massive conflagration, existing law requires a person operating internal combustion engines within wildland areas to carry firefighting tools. This bill revises existing law mandating what tools a party must carry and explicitly states that the existing wildland safety rules apply to a natural person, partnership, firm, association, corporation, limited liability company, or other legal entity.

This bill is sponsored by the Ventura County District Attorney (DA). The DA notes that in October 2024, a tractor driver clearing dry vegetation experienced an engine failure that accidentally ignited a fire on the tractor. The mandated firefighting equipment was down a hill in the driver's truck. In what became known as the Balcom Fire, firefighters limited the blaze to 1.8 acres. However, the DA notes, one week later, high winds dislodged and dispersed heated tire debris at the site, igniting the Mountain Fire, which burned nearly 20,000 acres, damaged 126 structures, and destroyed 243 more.

The DA argues that this fire may not have occurred if the required equipment had been in or attached to the tractor. In evaluating potential criminal liability for the fire, the DA's office determined that the driver did not act maliciously or recklessly. However, the office identified a gap in the law, which requires equipment to be merely "ready for use in the immediate area," which the office argues is a "vague legal standard that enabled the firefighting equipment to be too far from the ignition site and not physically placed on the tractor."

Writing in support, the Ventura County DA writes:

Not only does [the bill] clarify that when individuals work [on] open land on foot with certain portable tools, a fire extinguisher and shovels must be within 25 feet of the operation with enough shovels available, it also requires that a shovel and a fire extinguisher be in or affixed to the motor vehicle, such as a tractor. Industrial operations must have a sealed fire toolbox containing a fire extinguisher and sufficient shovels located within the operating area and accessible in the event of fire...[The bill] also standardizes and clarifies responsibility for compliance...making clear that compliance rests not only on the individual worker but also with the business entity responsible for the operation.