

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 629 (Durazo) – As Amended July 16, 2025

Policy Committee:	Emergency Management	Vote:	5 - 2
	Natural Resources		9 - 4

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

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to designate post-wildfire safety areas that trigger state fire protection standards, specifies additional relevant factors on which Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) are based, and requires each local or state fire authority to enforce vegetation management requirements through a wildfire community safety program.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the relevant factors on which FHSZs are based to include: (a) areas within the perimeter of a wildfire that burned 1,000 or more acres, destroyed more than 10 structures, or resulted in a fatality, (b) areas at risk for an urban conflagration that accounts for the potential for structures to serve as a fuel source, and (c) areas where agricultural land affects fire hazard.
- 2) Requires the SFM to designate an area burned in a wildfire on or after January 1, 2025, as a post-wildfire safety area where state fire protection standards must apply, and transmit a map of the area to a local agency with jurisdiction over territory in the area within 90 days of the wildfire reaching 100% containment or by May 1, 2026, whichever is later. Within 10 business days of receiving the map, a local agency must post a physical and online notice identifying the location of the post-wildfire safety area.
- 3) Requires a city or county with territory in a post-wildfire safety area to include, as part of the agency's general plan process, a review and update of the agency's safety element to address the risk of fire in the post-wildfire safety area.
- 4) Requires, beginning January 1, 2027, a local or state fire authority ("enforcing agency") to establish, fund, and implement a wildfire community safety program to educate community members and verify ongoing compliance with defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel modification requirements established pursuant to state fire protection standards. The enforcing agency must inspect and document the compliance of each affected property at least once annually and submit related data to the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE's) defensible space and home hardening assessment reporting platform. The enforcing agency may charge a fee sufficient to cover the costs of administering the program and conducting inspections.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Costs to CAL FIRE of \$146 million in year one, \$125 million in year two, and \$116 million ongoing beginning in year three to establish a new Wildfire Risk Modeling Division to accommodate workload related to the SFM's development of updated FHSZs and post-wildfire safety areas and CAL FIRE's role as an enforcing agency (General Fund). CAL FIRE anticipates needing to hire approximately 452 program positions and 77 administrative support positions; acquire hundreds of new vehicles; contract with risk-modeling vendors; and purchase data collection storage and software. CAL FIRE notes that up to 432 of the new positions would be fire captains and fire prevention specialists to conduct defensible space inspections of private property within the SRA. This process would include documenting the defensible space inspections and home hardening attributes using CAL FIRE's electronic platform and educating the homeowner about defensible space.
- 2) One-time costs of an unknown, but likely minor and absorbable, amount to each local agency within a post-wildfire safety area to post a copy of the map. If the Commission on State Mandates determines this bill's requirements to be a reimbursable state mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs to local agencies (General Fund).
- 3) Ongoing costs of an unknown amount to each city and county within a post-wildfire safety area to review and update the agency's safety element to address the risk of fire in the post-wildfire safety area. However, these costs are likely non-reimbursable by the state because costs related to the general plan process are generally recoverable through an agency's permitting fees.

Annual costs of an unknown, but likely significant amount, to each local enforcing agency to fund and implement a wildfire community safety program. However, these costs are likely non-reimbursable by the state because this bill authorizes the enforcing agency to charge a fee sufficient to cover the costs of administering the program and conducting inspections.

COMMENTS:

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

SB 629 is one of the 13 bills in the Senate's fire response, recover, rebuilding and prevention package. Following the devastating Los Angeles firestorm and as California continues to face a year-round fire season it is clear that we must harden California's defenses against future disasters. To help do that, SB 629 does three things:

- 1) It requires cities and counties to designate areas that burned in a wildfire within a post-wildfire safety area which triggers the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) building code and defensible space maintenance requirements, as well as other fire safety regulations.
- 2) It directs the State Fire Marshal to include modeling for urban conflagrations in the next update of the fire maps.
- 3) It mandates that defensible space inspections occur annually for each property in the State Responsibility Area, Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and post-wildfire safety area to ensure that property owners are taking action to protect their community.

- 2) **Background. Wildfire Risk.** California has a history of devastating wildfires, and the Palisades and Eaton Fires earlier this year are the most recent example of the growing size, duration, and destructivity of these fires. To address wildfire risk, existing law requires the SFM to identify FHSZs. FHSZs categorize fire likelihood and severity as moderate, high, and very high over a 30-to-50-year period based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, winds, and other relevant factors. In an area classified as a very high FHSZ or on land covered with flammable material, a local agency must maintain a defensible space of 100 feet from each side of a structure.

AB 3074 (Friedman), Chapter 259, Statutes of 2020, required the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) to adopt regulations to create an ember-resistant zone within five feet of a structure (zone zero). The Board has not yet promulgated such regulations, and the ember-resistant zone requirement will not take effect until the Board updates the regulations and corresponding guidance document. On February 6, 2025, Governor Newsom signed an executive order directing the Board to adopt regulations by December 31, 2025. AB 38 (Wood), Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019, requires defensible space inspections upon the sale of a home in areas designated as high and very high FHSZs. Such inspections will include compliance with the ember-resistant-zone regulations once the regulations are in effect.

This bill requires new factors, including risk of urban conflagration, be considered in the designation of FHSZs. This bill also creates a new designation of a “post-wildfire safety area,” which includes the area burned in a wildfire and triggers the application of specific state fire protection standards, defined to include certain home hardening building standards and the ember-resistant-zone regulations, among others. This bill also creates related mapping requirements to better inform communities of and protect communities from wildfires.

Local Costs. As the Assembly Natural Resources Committee analysis notes, “barriers homeowners typically face related to completing defensible space work include prohibitive costs and/or time constraints, inadequate motivation to comply, and incomplete understanding of the nature of the risk to their home.” The bill requires a local or state fire authority to establish and fund a wildfire community safety program to educate the authority’s communities on wildfire risk and safety and verify ongoing compliance with state fire protection standards.

- 3) **Support and Opposition.** There is no registered support on file for this bill.

This bill is opposed by the City of La Verne, which argues this bill “imposes significant local obligations, mandating the reclassification of areas and establishing a costly new inspection and enforcement regime, without assurances of full state reimbursement.”

- 4) **Related Legislation.** AB 261 (Quirk Silva) authorizes the SFM to confer with entities and members of the public on actions that may impact an area’s FHSZ designation and to provide a written response to an entity on actions that may impact the degree of fire hazard. AB 261 is pending hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 300 (Lackey) requires the SFM to identify and re-review lands within the state responsibility area (SRA) as FHSZs and areas in the state as moderate, high, or very high FHSZs every five years. AB 300 is pending hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1143 (Bennett) requires the SFM's Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop a home hardening certification program. AB 1143 is pending hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 1455 (Bryan) clarifies CAL FIRE's authority to adopt regulations for defensible space requirements for an ember-resistant zone in the local responsibility area (LRA) and authorizes adoption of regulations for the SRA and LRA as emergency regulations. AB 1455 is pending hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 326 (Becker) requires a coordinated framework to address wildfire risk and mitigation and moves up the effective date for the ember-resistant zone requirement around specified buildings. SB 326 is pending hearing in this committee.

SB 514 (Cabaldon) removes the sunset date on the statewide program to allow qualified entities to support and augment CAL FIRE in its defensible space and home hardening assessment responsibilities and expands the list and role of qualified participating entities. SB 514 is pending hearing in this committee.

- 5) **Prior Legislation.** SB 610 (Wiener), of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session, would have eliminated the state's fire hazard severity mapping for the SRA and LRA and required the SFM to designate Wildfire Mitigation Areas through regulations for fire mitigation across the state. SB 610 was held on this committee's suspense file.

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