

SENATE THIRD READING

STR Bill Id:SB 629 Author:(Durazo)

As Amended Ver:July 16, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes a new post-wildfire safety area designation; requires the State Fire Marshal (SFM) to designate post-wildfire safety areas which trigger state fire protection standards; and requires Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) be based upon additional criteria, including post-wildfire safety areas.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires FHSZ designations to be based, in addition to existing criteria, on (1) land within the perimeter of a wildfire that burned 1,000 or more acres, destroyed more than 10 structures, or resulted in one or more fatalities (post-wildfire safety area), (2) urban areas near wildland areas where structures may act as fuel and (3) areas where agricultural land affects fire hazard.
- 2) Requires, on or after January 1, 2025, the SFM to designate any area within the perimeter of a wildfire that burned 1,000 or more acres, destroyed more than 10 structures, or resulted in one or more fatalities, as a post-wildfire safety area.
- 3) Requires a post-wildfire safety area designation to trigger state fire protection provisions, as specified, in each designated area.
- 4) Requires the SFM to transmit post-wildfire safety maps to locals within 90 days of the wildfire reaching 100% containment or by May 1, 2026, whichever is later, and requires a local agency to post notices identifying the post-wildfire safety area location at local government offices and online within 10 business days of receiving the map from the SFM.
- 5) Requires a city or county with territory in a post-wildfire safety area to review and update the safety element of its general plan to address the risk of fire in post-wildfire safety areas.

COMMENTS

Background: Throughout California's history the state has contended with destructive wildfires impacting communities that were constructed amongst or adjacent to timber and chaparral forests. These areas, commonly referred to as the "wildland urban interface" (WUI), have long been considered some of the most fire-prone areas in the state. While the roughly 11 million people living in forested areas and those in the wildland urban interface, have long faced significant risks from wildfires, as a result of climate change, more Californians face wildfire risks than ever before. In the last decade, unprecedented wildfires led to the deadliest wildfires in California's history. The impacts of these wildfires cannot be understated, especially as an increasing number of wildfires burned outside of wildland areas and into more urban settings. In January 2025, wildfires in Los Angeles County burned a combined 37,469 acres, leveling entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County. The Eaton Fire became the second most destructive fire in California history after destroying 9,418 buildings, 1,074 structures damaged, and 17 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire is the third most destructive fire in state history, with 6,837 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities.

Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ): The SFM is required to identify areas in the state responsibility area (SRA) as moderate, high, and very high FHSZs and very high FHSZs for lands in local responsibility areas (LRA), based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors present, including areas where winds have been identified by the department as a major cause of wildfire spread. The process of designating FHSZs averages five years of onerous data evaluation and coordination with hundreds of local jurisdictions statewide. FHSZs are developed using a science-based and field-tested model that assigns a hazard score based on the factors that influence fire likelihood and fire behavior over a 30 to 50-year period without considering risk mitigation measures such as home hardening, defensible space, vegetation management, or fuel reduction efforts. As the current process only evaluates hazards and not risks, this bill makes a significant change to the models by requiring certain risks, such as risk of an urban conflagration, be included.

Maps and Possible Confusion over Separate Designations: As noted above, the process of developing FHSZ designations, and their associated maps, takes CALFIRE approximately 5 years. The most recent FHSZ map for the SRA was published in 2024 and the LRA very high FHSZ map was published in 2025.

This bill would create additional, and likely temporary, post-fire safety area maps that may result in confusion between the two designations: post-wildfire safety areas and FHSZs. For context, this bill does require the FHSZ maps to incorporate any post-wildfire safety areas. Upon incorporation into the FHSZ maps, the post-wildfire safety areas would likely be mapped as "very high FHSZs" because post-wildfire safety area designations trigger the same state fire protection provisions that apply to very high FHSZs and the bill does not create a new "post-wildfire safety area" designation for FHSZ maps.

However, it is unclear whether newly transmitted post-wildfire safety maps would be incorporated into the FHSZ maps immediately or upon the next formal update of the FHSZ maps. If the post-wildfire safety areas are not incorporated into the FHSZ map until the next formal update, post-wildfire areas would remain a separate designation, with their own map, for up to five years, approximately. Conversely, immediately incorporating the post-wildfire areas into the most recent version of the FHSZ maps, by mapping the post-wildfire areas as very high FHSZs, would prevent confusion as only a FHSZ map would be necessary. Yet, the process of establishing and noticing any newly identified post-wildfire safety areas – especially without also referencing the very high FHSZ designation and any associated changes to the FHSZ map – may remain confusing.

Fire Safe Regulations: Properties within a very high fire hazard zone are subject to the strictest requirements from the building codes, "Fire Safe" regulations, and defensible space requirements. Properties not immediately in the wildland urban interface but subject to fire risks are now characterized as being in "high fire hazard severity zones." If enacted, this bill would apply those existing requirements to post-fire safety areas.

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:

- 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.

Arguments in Support

None on file.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) Costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount, to CAL FIRE to accommodate workload related to the SFM's development of updated FHSZs and post-wildfire safety areas (General Fund).
- 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.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 29-3-8

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO: Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Strickland

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Dahle, Grove, Niello, Reyes, Seyarto, Valladares

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 5-2-0

YES: Ransom, Arambula, Bains, Bennett, Calderon

NO: Hadwick, DeMaio

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 9-4-1

YES: Bryan, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Kalra, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Zbur

NO: Alanis, Ellis, Flora, Hoover

ABS, ABST OR NV: Wicks

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Ahrens, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Sanchez, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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