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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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Bill No: SB 629  
Author: Durazo (D), et al.  
Amended: 9/2/25 in Assembly  
Vote: 21

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SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 11-1, 4/22/25

AYES: Padilla, Valladares, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber Pierson

NOES: Ochoa Bogh

NO VOTE RECORDED: Dahle, Hurtado, Jones

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE: 5-0, 4/30/25

AYES: Durazo, Arreguín, Cabaldon, Laird, Wiener

NO VOTE RECORDED: Choi, Seyarto

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-0, 5/23/25

AYES: Caballero, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Dahle

SENATE FLOOR: 29-3, 6/3/25

AYES: 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

NOES: Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Strickland

NO VOTE RECORDED: Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Dahle, Grove, Niello, Reyes, Seyarto, Valladares

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 45-17, 9/12/25 – Roll call vote not available.

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**SUBJECT:** Wildfires: fire hazard severity zones: post-wildfire safety areas

**SOURCE:** Author

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**DIGEST:** This bill 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) to be based upon additional criteria, including post-wildfire safety areas, as specified.

*Assembly Amendments* of 9/2/25 establish and require the SFM to designate a new “post-wildfire safety area,” as specified, and delete the requirement that each local or state fire authority to establish, fund, and implement a wildfire community safety program.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Requires the SFM to identify areas of the state as moderate, high, and very high FHSZ based on specified data.
- 2) Establishes the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) to determine, establish, and maintain an adequate forest policy for the state, and protect all wildland forest resources in California that are not under federal jurisdiction.

This bill:

- 1) Requires FHSZ designations to be based, in addition to existing criteria, on: 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, as specified; urban areas near wildland areas where structures may act as fuel; and areas where agricultural land affects fire hazard, as specified.
- 2) Requires 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, as specified.
- 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.

## **Background**

*Author Statement.* According to the author's office, "SB 629 is one of the 13 bills in the Senate's fire response, recovery, 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."

*California's Worsening Wildfire Reality.* The State of California has the main responsibility for wildfire response activities on about one-third of California's land area. With over 39 million residents, the State of California is the most populous state in the nation and has the third largest land area among the states (163,695 square miles).

Cal FIRE works to safeguard California through fire prevention and protection, emergency response, and stewardship of natural resource systems. Cal FIRE works to contain large wildfires, preventing them from spreading, damaging communities, and endangering residents. The state also runs programs to reduce the chances that wildfires will start and to limit the damage they cause when they do occur—also known as wildfire prevention and mitigation. One approach to mitigating future wildfire disasters is to reduce the chance that homes ignite when wildfires occur nearby, such as through the maintenance of defensible space – areas free of excess or dead vegetation – around homes.

Many of the largest and most damaging wildfires have occurred in recent years. In January of this year, a series of 14 destructive fires affected the greater Los Angeles Metropolitan area and San Diego County. In the Los Angeles area, the fires killed 29 people, forced more than 200,000 to evacuate or otherwise be displaced, and destroyed more than 18,000 homes and structures while burning over 57,000 acres of land. The 2018 Camp Fire in Butte was the deadliest wildfire in California history, claiming the lives of 85 people, burning over 150,000 acres, and destroying more than 18,000 structures. The previous year, the October 2017 North Bay fires (a series of 250 wildfires in the Counties of Napa, Lake, Sonoma,

Mendocino, Butte, and Solano) burned over 245,000 acres, killed 44 people, and destroyed nearly 9,000 structures.

*Office of the State Fire Marshal.* The mission of the SFM is to protect life and property through the development and application of fire prevention engineering, education and enforcement. The SFM supports the mission of Cal FIRE by focusing on fire prevention and provides support through a wide variety of fire safety responsibilities. Additionally, the SFM classifies certain lands within the state into FHSZs. Each zone is 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. Unlike an insurance company's risk assessment of a house in the woods, which might take into account its composite wood sidings, hazard maps only take into account the lasting facts about a location.

*Defensible Space.* Defensible space is the buffer created between a building on a property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it helps protect structures from catching fire. A 2019 analysis done by CAL FIRE of the relationship between defensible space compliance and destruction of structures during the seven largest fires that occurred in California in 2017 and 2018 concluded that the odds of a structure being destroyed by wildfire were roughly five times higher for noncompliant structures compared to compliant ones.

The defensible space for all structures within the SRA and VHFHSZ is 100 feet. CAL FIRE additionally requires the removal of all dead plants, grass, and weeds, and the removal of dry leaves and pine needles within 30 feet of a structure. In addition, tree branches must be 10 feet away from a chimney and other trees within that same 30 feet surrounding a structure. AB 3074 (Friedman, Chapter 259, Statutes of 2020), established an ember-resistant zone within 5 feet of a structure as part of revised defensible space requirements for structures located in FHSZs (known as Zone 0).

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) report "Reducing the Destructiveness of Wildfires: Promoting Defensible Space in California," inspections are the main type of activity state and local agencies take related to defensible space. During inspections, inspector visit properties to assess their compliance with defensible space requirements. State and local agencies vary in how they conduct inspections, which properties are prioritized for inspections, and the training provided to inspectors.

**Related/Prior Legislation**

SB 610 (Wiener, 2023) would have established a new framework under the authority of the SFM to identify areas of the state for fire mitigation, replacing the state's existing FHSZ mapping, as specified. (Held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

AB 9 (Wood, Chapter 225, Statutes of 2021) established the director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation within the Office of the SFM , and transferred and delegated certain duties related to fire safety and wildfire prevention from Cal FIRE to the Office of the SFM, as specified.

AB 3074 (Friedman, Chapter 259, Statutes of 2020) established, upon appropriation, an ember-resistant zone within five feet of a structure as part of the defensible space requirements for structures located in specified high FHSZs. AB 38 (Wood, Chapter 391, Statutes of 2019) requires specified disclosures for the sale of real property in a high or very high FHSZ related to fire safety including home hardening and defensible space, as specified.

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, 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).

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 the bill's requirements to be a reimbursable state mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs to local agencies (General Fund).

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.

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 9/8/25)

None received

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 9/8/25)

City of La Verne

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:** In opposition to the bill, the City of La Verne writes that, “[w]hile the City of La Verne supports meaningful strategies to increase wildfire resilience and protect communities in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, SB 629 introduces problematic criteria and enforcement provisions that are not sufficiently grounded in fire science. Specifically, the bill's trigger for reclassification of hazard severity zones, any fire over 1,000 acres, resulting in more than 10 structures destroyed, or one fatality, fails to recognize that these thresholds are not inherently tied to wildfire behavior in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Fires meeting these metrics can and do occur in densely populated urban areas, where vegetation management and defensible space strategies are neither relevant nor effective.”

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9/12/25 21:38:23

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