

mental regulations to speed up forest management projects aimed at reducing the fuel load for the upcoming wildfire season. By removing dead trees or clearing brush, the programs aim to reduce the threat of wildfires by creating fuel breaks, defensible space and safe travel corridors around vulnerable communities.

Some environmental groups, however, question whether logging would damage ecosystems and suggest it's more effective to clear vegetation around homes.

Restrictions on where and how to build

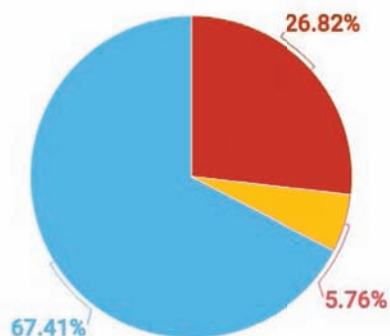
Even when fires threaten homes and no help is in sight, all is not lost. There is much homeowners can do to prepare and protect their property in the face of wildfire, beginning with clearing trees, brush and wood piles around their houses.

The manner of construction and the types of materials used can help give structures a fighting chance against the advance of flames. California building codes for new homes require forgoing wooden roofs and decks in favor of fire-resistant materials, among other things.

Among the actions homeowners can take to protect their property:

- Install double-paned windows.
- Detach garages and storage sheds from the main house.

BUILDING HOMES IN RISKY LOCATIONS



- Homes in lower-risk areas
- Fire-zone homes backing up to dense vegetation
- Fire-zone homes within 1.5 mi of dense vegetation

Nearly 1 in 3 California homes lies in the wildland-urban interface—in or near dense vegetation. Some 4 million are in zones especially vulnerable to wildfire.

- Put ember-resistant vents in attics and elsewhere.
- Consider fire-resistant cladding such as stucco or stone.

There are, however, places where the risk is so great that fire scientists say homes simply should not be built—even in a state where housing shortages have reached crisis levels.

In California from 1990 to 2010, an estimated 45 percent of new housing units were constructed in the “wildland-urban interface”—where suburbia and rural towns back up onto wild, and combustible, landscapes. With more residences sprouting on the edge of wildlands or deep in narrow canyons, fires become an inevitability and firefighters have a tougher and larger territory to defend.

What to do? State lawmakers already have extended some state restrictions to local lands, and some have talked about possible rebates or other subsidies for residents who cannot afford to “harden” their homes. But essentially legislators are grappling with an unpalatable reality: Require even more extensive and expensive upgrades to existing homes, or ban building altogether in some areas. That discussion is as potentially explosive as the fires themselves.

Bills to watch in 2019

While Gov. Newsom is monitoring PG&E bankruptcy developments, state lawmakers have turned their focus toward prevention. Here are some key proposals for the 2019 legislative session:

- Senate Bill 190 (Sen. Bill Dodd of Napa) would direct the State Fire Marshal to develop a defensible space ordinance for local governments to adopt and enforce.
- Senate Bill 209 (Sen. Dodd) establishes the California Wildfire Warning Center in order to better predict weather conditions and share information around the state. Requires that utilities install additional weather monitoring equipment in high fire threat areas.
- Senate Bill 290 (Sen. Dodd) is sponsored by Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara and Treasurer Fiona Ma. It would authorize the state to explore purchasing a policy to cover wildfires, earthquakes, floods and other disasters.
- Assembly Bill 235 (Assemblyman Chad Mayes of Yucca Valley) would create the California Wildfire Catastrophe Fund Authority financed by participating utilities to reimburse the utility for liability costs that exceed their established insurance levels.
- Assembly Bill 281 (Assemblyman Jim Frazier of Fairfield) has early-stage language that proposes to have California utilities relocate underground or otherwise enhance the safety of transmission and distribution lines in high fire-threat areas.

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