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Home Hardening: Issues for Legislative Consideration

PRESENTED TO:

Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on Climate
Crisis, Resources, Energy and Transportation
Hon. Steve Bennett, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

Defensible Space and Home Hardening

Defensible Space and Home Hardening Are Two Important Wildfire Mitigation Strategies. Two important ways homeowners can mitigate potential losses from wildfires are maintaining the defensible space around their homes—to be free of dead or excess vegetation—and hardening their homes—building or retrofitting homes with fire-resistant building materials and construction features. Defensible space and home hardening not only help protect individual homes, but also reduce the risk of wildfire spreading to neighboring properties.

State and Local Governments Use Various Approaches to Promote Defensible Space and Home Hardening. These include:

- ***Regulations and Requirements.*** Requiring homeowners in high wildfire risk areas to maintain defensible space within specified zones around their homes and use certain materials during home construction or renovation.
- ***Inspections, Education, and Enforcement Actions.*** Inspecting homes to determine compliance with adopted regulations and requirements, helping educate homeowners on potential options to achieve compliance, and undertaking enforcement activities as needed.
- ***Financial Assistance and Other Incentives.*** Providing homeowners with grants, in-kind support, loans, and other assistance to perform defensible space and home hardening measures. Also, incentivizing homeowners to continue maintaining their defensible space and home hardening once they are completed.



State Funding for Home Hardening-Related Efforts

State Has Funded Several Home Hardening-Related Efforts. These include:

- ***California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP).*** Total of \$38 million (\$25 million General Fund in 2020-21 and \$13 million Proposition 4 in 2025-26) for the Office of Emergency Services—together with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire)—to develop a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program focused on both cost-effective home hardening and defensible space activities.
- ***Defensible Space Inspectors.*** Total of \$20 million General Fund since 2020-21 for CalFire to perform defensible space inspections on 750,000 parcels in the State Responsibility Area. CalFire’s annual goal is to complete 250,000 parcel inspections, so every parcel is inspected at least once every three years.
- ***Land Use Planning and Public Education Outreach Programs.*** Total of \$16 million General Fund since 2021-22 for CalFire and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources to assist with local wildfire mitigation planning and to provide communities with tools and workshops on best practices.

Additional Funding Proposed in Governor’s 2026-27 Budget.

This includes (1) additional \$26 million from Proposition 4 for CWMP, (2) \$20 million from Proposition 4 for direct financial assistance to homeowners for defensible space mitigations, and (3) \$6 million ongoing General Fund for CalFire defensible space inspectors.



Key Issues for Legislative Consideration

Proposed Funding Provides Opportunity for Legislature to Consider Important Home Hardening-Related Issues. These include:

- **Appropriate State Role.** What is the role of state government in state defensible space and home hardening efforts and how might it change over time? How, if at all, should the state role differ across these two categories of activities? What are the appropriate roles and responsibilities for other entities, such as homeowners?
- **Intergovernmental Coordination.** How can different levels of government coordinate across their home hardening efforts to achieve a greater impact?
- **Cost-Effective, Scalable Approaches.** Which home hardening efforts have been shown to be most cost-effective? How can limited state funding be used, together with other resources, to scale these efforts statewide?
- **Program Design and Eligibility.** How are state home hardening programs currently designed, who do they serve, and what measurable outcomes have been and/or will they achieve?
- **Long-Term Sustainability.** How can home hardening programs incentivize homeowners to continue these efforts over the long term?
- **Impediments to Implementation.** What are some of the impediments to the successful implementation of home hardening programs, and how can they be addressed?
- **Program Evaluation.** How often should the state evaluate its home hardening programs and according to what criteria?

