

Security/Burglar Bar Facts

The Problem

Security bars, or burglar bars as they are often called, when installed without quick-release mechanisms, trap victims during fires and can make rescue impossible. In 1995, five children died in an Oakland house fire because of burglar bars that could not be opened. This led to the introduction of AB 3131 and AB 3026. Both bills became law in 1996.



AB 3131 (Health and Safety Code 13113.9)

- Requires that all security bars sold in California be packaged with prominent labeling on the bars, or on the package, or on both, directing the consumer or installer to contact the local fire department or building official to determine whether the city or county requires that burglar bars be equipped with a release mechanism. The labeling and packaging must meet State Fire Marshal regulations pursuant to the standards of the California Building Code, Part 12, Chapter 12-3 and other applicable provisions of Part 2.
- Requires that a contractor or installer provide warnings to the owner.

AB 3026

- Allows local governments to establish a specific date by which all residential property with security bars on bedroom windows must meet current state and local requirements for safety release mechanisms.
- Requires that real estate transactions disclose the presence of window bars, and whether they are equipped with quick-release mechanisms.

And yet nine more people died in a fire in East Palo Alto in 1997 because security/burglar bars prevented them from escaping.

As a result of these deaths State Senators Barbara Lee and Richard Polanco introduced SB 1405, which was signed by Governor Pete Wilson on September 22, 1998, and became effective on January 1, 1999.

SB1405 (Health & Safety Code 13114.2)

- Prohibits the sale of any bars in California that do not have the appropriate labeling and packaging information after August 1, 1998.
- Prohibits the installation of unopenable bars, under any conditions, where prohibited by the California Building Code after July 1, 1998.
- Allows only those bars and safety release mechanisms that have been tested by a State Fire Marshal approved laboratory be sold, distributed or installed after October 1, 1999. *(Amended to on or after July 1, 2000)*
- Prohibits the installation or maintenance of burglar bars on any residential dwelling owned or leased by a public agency unless the bars meet current state and local requirements.
- Requires the State Fire Marshal to mount a public education effort on the dangers of illegal burglar bars, to the extent resources are available.

What can citizens do?

If you rent your home, contact your landlord and ask him or her to replace the illegal bars with approved quick release bars. If you receive no response, put your request to the landlord in writing and mail it. If you still receive no response, take a copy of your letter along with the landlord's address to your local building officials and ask for their help in enforcing the law. The California Building Officials, located in Sacramento, can help refer you to your local officials. They can be reached at (916) 457-1103.

If you own your home, replace any bars that do not have quick release mechanisms. Practice exit drills – your life and your family's lives could depend on it.



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