

FACT SHEET:

California's Fire Hazard Severity Zones

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

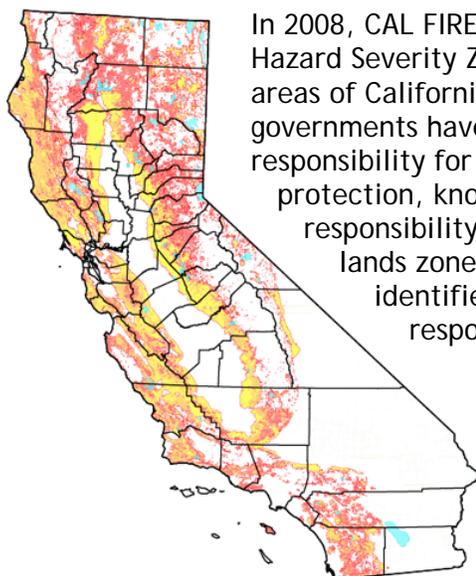
Office of the State Fire Marshal



While all of California is subject to some degree of fire hazard, there are specific features that make some areas more hazardous. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is required by law¹ to map areas of significant fire hazards based on fuels, terrain, weather, and other relevant factors.

These zones, referred to as Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ), influence how people construct buildings and protect property to reduce risk associated with wildland fires. The maps were last updated in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. They are currently being updated to incorporate improved fire science, data and mapping techniques.

The proposed Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for lands where the state has financial responsibility for wildland fire protection, known as state responsibility area or SRA, are available for review and public comment. A series of public hearings is being conducted in 56 counties with state responsibility area lands to gather comment for consideration. After the comment period ends, the CAL FIRE Director will either modify or adopt the Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps.



In 2008, CAL FIRE will produce Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for the areas of California where local governments have financial responsibility for wildland fire protection, known as local responsibility areas, or LRA. Only lands zoned very high are identified within local responsibility areas.



Buildings on the fringes of California's wildland areas face a greater fire hazard than those in cities and towns.

Fire Hazard Elements

Vegetation - Fire hazard considers the potential vegetation over a 30- to 50-year time horizon. Vegetation is "fuel" to a wildfire and it changes over time.

Topography - Fire typically burns faster up steep slopes.

Weather - Fire moves faster under hot, dry, and windy conditions.

Crown Fire Potential - Under extreme conditions, fires burn to the top of trees and tall brush.

Ember production and movement - Fire brands are embers blown ahead of the main fire. Fire brands spread the wildfire and they get into buildings and catch the building on fire.

Likelihood - Chances of an area burning over a 30- to 50-year time period based on history and other factors.

¹ (PRC 4201-4204 and Govt. Code 51175-89)



Burning embers, known as firebrands, spread fire ahead of the flame front and can ignite buildings up to a mile away from the main fire.

How are zones determined?

The Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps were developed using a science-based and field-tested computer model that assigns a hazard score based on the factors that influence fire likelihood and fire behavior. Many factors are considered such as fire history, existing and potential fuel (natural vegetation), flame length, blowing embers, terrain, and typical weather for the area. There are three hazard zones in state responsibility areas: moderate, high and very high.

Urban and wildland areas are treated differently in the model, but the model does recognize the influence of burning embers traveling into urban areas, which is a major cause of fire spread.

What is the map for?

The Fire Hazard Severity Zones identify fire hazard, not fire risk. "Hazard" is based on the physical conditions that give a likelihood that an area will burn over a 30 to 50-year period without considering modifications such as fuel reduction efforts. "Risk" is the potential damage a fire can do to the area under existing conditions, including any modifications such as defensible space, irrigation and sprinklers, and ignition resistant building construction which can reduce fire risk. Risk considers the susceptibility of what is being protected.



Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps are intended to be used for:

- Implementing wildland-urban interface building standards for new construction
- Natural hazard real estate disclosure at time of sale
- 100-foot defensible space clearance requirements around buildings
- Property development standards such as road widths, water supply and signage
- Considered in city and county general plans

How do I determine the fire hazard in my area?

Visit the CAL FIRE Website at www.fire.ca.gov. You can enter your address and easily find your Fire Hazard Severity Zone IF your property is in the state responsibility area. The statewide map and maps for each county with state responsibility area lands are also posted. For more information about Fire Hazard Severity Zones or wildland-urban interface building codes, contact your local CAL FIRE Unit.