

Controversial bill to abolish California fire hazard rankings dies in Legislature

August 19 2024, by Hayley Smith, Los Angeles Times



Credit: Deep Rajwar from Pexels

A bill that sought to overhaul California's system for wildfire hazard mapping has died in the state Assembly.

Senate Bill 610, introduced in June by Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, sparked heated debate over its plan to eliminate the decades-old system of ranking state and local lands as "moderate," "high" or "very high" fire hazard severity zones—designations that influence development patterns and building safety standards based on an area's probability of burning.

The plan instead would have empowered California's state fire marshal, Daniel Berlant, to create a single "[wildfire](#) mitigation area" classification for California, which supporters said would simplify the system and create a uniform set of standards for wildfire preparation and mitigation.

The bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee on Thursday.

"We're relieved this dangerous proposal will not be moving forward this year," said J.P. Rose, a policy director and senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, who opposed the bill.

Rose and other critics had described SB 610 as "true insanity" that would make it easier to develop more housing in fire-prone areas. They said it would also wrest decision-making power over such decisions away from [local governments](#).

Rose said he viewed Thursday's decision as a victory for the more than 150 organizations that weighed in against the bill in a series of open letters to Gov. Gavin Newsom and state legislators.

"We look forward to collaborating with the Legislature in steering new housing away from high-risk areas while supporting equitable and climate-resilient development in existing communities," he said.

Proponents of the legislation, on the other hand, said the plan would not

dictate where property can be built but would instead streamline the current system and ensure uniform fire protection standards for all buildings in designated wildfire mitigation areas.

"The critical need to strengthen our wildfire mitigations continues," Berlant said in a [text message](#) on Friday. "We will continue to work with our stakeholders to address the need to bring change to the unacceptable trajectory we have been on related to homes being destroyed [by] wildfire."

Wiener did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Legislative officials said it is likely the bill will be revived next year.

SB 610 is "something I care a lot about," Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks, chair of the appropriations committee, told reporters after the hearing.

"I've worked with the senator on this, and I think we need more time to continue to work on it," Wicks said. "But I expect we'll see more action on that next year as well."

2024 Los Angeles Times. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Controversial bill to abolish California fire hazard rankings dies in Legislature (2024, August 19) retrieved 19 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-controversial-bill-abolish-california-hazard.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--