

# General Plan Safety Element Assessment

## Board of Forestry and Fire Protection



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## Purpose and Background

Upon the next revision of the housing element on or after January 1, 2014, the safety element is required to be reviewed and updated as necessary to address the risk of fire for land classified as state responsibility areas and land classified as very high fire hazard severity zone (GOV § 65302(g)(3)).

The safety element is required to include:

- Fire hazard severity zone maps available from the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
- Any historical data on wildfires available from local agencies or a reference to where the data can be found.
- Information about wildfire hazard areas that may be available from the United States Geological Survey.
- The general location and distribution of existing and planned uses of land in very high fire hazard severity zones and in state responsibility areas, including structures, roads, utilities, and essential public facilities. The location and distribution of planned uses of land shall not require defensible space compliance measures required by state law or local ordinance to occur on publicly owned lands or open space designations of homeowner associations.
- The local, state, and federal agencies with responsibility for fire protection, including special districts and local offices of emergency services. (GOV § 65302(g)(3)(A))

Based on that information, the safety element shall include goals, policies, and objectives that protect the community from the unreasonable risk of wildfire (GOV § 65302(g)(3)(B)). To carry out those goals, policies, and objectives, feasible implementation measures shall be included in the safety element, which include but are not limited to:

- Avoiding or minimizing the wildfire hazards associated with new uses of land.
- Locating, when feasible, new essential public facilities outside of high fire risk areas, including, but not limited to, hospitals and health care facilities, emergency shelters, emergency command centers, and emergency communications facilities, or identifying construction methods or other methods to minimize damage if these facilities are located in a state responsibility area or very high fire hazard severity zone.
- Designing adequate infrastructure if a new development is located in a state responsibility area or in a very high fire hazard severity zone, including safe access for emergency response vehicles, visible street signs, and water supplies for structural fire suppression.
- Working cooperatively with public agencies with responsibility for fire protection (GOV § 65302(g)(3)(C)).

The safety element shall also attach or reference any fire safety plans or other documents adopted by the city or county that fulfill the goals and objectives or contains the information required above (GOV § 65302(g)(3)(D)).

There are several reference documents developed by state agencies to assist local jurisdictions in updating their safety elements to include wildfire safety. The Fire Hazard Planning General Plan Technical Advice Series from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, referenced in GOV § 65302(g)(3) and available at [https://www.opr.ca.gov/docs/Final\\_6.26.15.pdf](https://www.opr.ca.gov/docs/Final_6.26.15.pdf), provides policy guidance, information resources, and fire hazard planning examples from around California.

The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) provides two documents for jurisdictions: A *Handbook for Fire Planning in the General Plan* (available on the Board's website at [http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board\\_joint\\_policies/local\\_government/](http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_joint_policies/local_government/)) and this *Safety Element Assessment* (location on Board's website). The Handbook for Fire Planning in the General Plan provides an overview of fire hazard planning and gives guidance on how to incorporate fire hazard planning into a jurisdiction's overall strategic planning, not just the safety element.

The Safety Element Assessment is utilized in the Board's review of safety elements under GOV §

1 65302.5. At least 90 days prior to the adoption or amendment of their safety element, counties that  
2 contain state responsibility area and cities or counties that contain very high fire hazard severity zones  
3 shall submit their safety element to the Board (GOV § 65302.5(b)). The Board shall review the safety  
4 element and respond to the city or county with its findings regarding the uses of land and policies in  
5 state responsibility areas and very high fire hazard severity zones that will protect life, property, and  
6 natural resources from unreasonable risks associated with wild land fires, and the methods and  
7 strategies for wild land fire risk reduction and prevention within state responsibility areas and very high  
8 fire hazard severity zones (GOV § 65302.5(b)(3)). This Assessment provides guidance to local  
9 jurisdictions on how the Board will be reviewing and considering the jurisdiction's proposed uses of  
10 land in state responsibility areas/very high fire hazard severity zones, and methods and strategies that  
11 would be considered sufficient to mitigate the wild land fire risk. The Assessment also includes  
12 suggestions for incorporating fire hazard planning into other relevant general plan elements. Wildland  
13 fire safety is best accomplished by holistic, strategic fire planning that takes advantage of opportunities  
14 to align priorities and implementation measures within and across plans.  
15

16 The CAL FIRE Land Use Planning team provides expert fire protection assistance to local jurisdictions  
17 statewide. Fire captains are available to work with cities and counties to revise their safety elements  
18 and enhance their strategic fire protection planning.  
19

## 20 **Methodology for Review and Recommendations**

21  
22 Utilizing staff from the CAL FIRE Land Use Planning team, the Board has established a standardized  
23 method to review the safety element of general plans. The methodology includes

- 24 1) reviewing the safety element for the requirements in GOV § 65302(g)(3)(A),
- 25 2) examining the safety element for goals, policies, objectives, and implementation measures that  
26 mitigate the wildfire risk in the planning area (GOV § 65302(g)(3)(B) and (C) and
- 27 3) making recommendations related to methods and strategies for wild land fire risk reduction and  
28 prevention (GOV § 65302.5(b)(3)(B)).  
29

30 The Assessment below contains the evaluation factors for determining if a safety element meets the  
31 fire safety requirements outlined in Government Code. It also contains recommended goals, policies,  
32 objectives, and implementation measures a city or county may utilize to meet those requirements and  
33 reduce the wildland fire risk to their planning area. Once completed, the Assessment should provide  
34 clear guidance to a city or county regarding any areas of deficiency in the safety element as well as  
35 specific goals, policies, objectives, and implementation measures the Board recommends adopting in  
36 order to mitigate or reduce the wildfire threat. The Assessment can also be used by cities or counties  
37 just embarking on a safety element or general plan update as a tool to spark discussion amongst  
38 stakeholders.

**Safety Element Assessment**

<b>Background Information Summary</b>			
<p>Specific background information about fire hazards in each jurisdiction.  <i>Indicate whether the safety element includes the specified information. If YES, indicate in the comments where that information can be found; if NO, provide recommendations to the jurisdiction regarding how best to include that information in their revised safety element.</i></p>			
	Yes	No	Comments/Recommendations
Are Fire Hazard Severity Zone Identified? <i>CAL FIRE or Locally Adopted Maps</i>			
Is historical data on wildfires or a reference to where the data can be found included?			
Has the general location and distribution of existing and planned uses of land in very high fire hazard severity zones and in state responsibility areas, including structures, roads, utilities, and essential public facilities, been identified?			
Have local, state, and federal agencies with responsibility for fire protection, including special districts and local offices of emergency services, been identified?			
Are other fire protection plans, such as Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, CAL FIRE Unit or Contract County Fire Plans, referenced or incorporated into the Safety Element?			
Any other relevant information regarding fire hazards in the SRA or VHFHSZ?			

**Goals, Policies, Objectives, and Feasible Implementation Measures**  
 A set of goals, policies, and objectives based on the above information to protect the community from unreasonable risk of wildfire and implementation measures to accomplish those stated goals, policies, and objectives.  
*Critically examine the submitted safety element and determine if it is adequate to address the jurisdiction's unique fire hazard. Answer YES or NO appropriately for each question below. If the recommendation is irrelevant or unrelated to the jurisdiction's fire hazard, answer N/A. For NO, provide information in the Comments/Recommendations section to help the jurisdiction incorporate that change into their safety element revision. This information may utilize recommendations from Safety Element Recommendations and Fire Hazard Planning in Other Elements of the General Plan below, may indicate how high of a priority this recommendation is for a jurisdiction, or may include other jurisdiction-specific information or recommendations.*

<b>1. Avoiding or minimizing the wildfire hazards associated with new uses of land.</b>				
	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/Recommendations
<b>Land Use</b>				
Does local ordinance require development standards that meet or exceed 14 CCR § 1270 and 14 CCR § 1299 for VHFHSZ and/or SRA?				

Are there goals and policies to avoid or minimize new residential development in fire hazard areas?				
Has fire safe design been incorporated into future development requirements?				
Are new essential public facilities located outside high fire risk areas, such as VHFHSZ, when feasible?				
Are there plans or actions identified to mitigate existing non-conforming development to contemporary fire safe standards, in terms of road standards and vegetative hazard?				
Does the plan include policies to evaluate re-development after a large fire?				
<b>Fuel Modification</b>				
Is fuel modification around homes and subdivisions required for new development in SRA or VHFHSZ?				
Are fire protection plans required for new development in VHFHSZ?				
Does the plan address long term maintenance of fire hazard reduction projects, including community fire breaks and private road and public road clearance?				
<b>Access</b>				
Is there adequate access (ingress, egress) to new development in very high fire hazard severity zones?				
Are minimum standards for evacuation of residential areas in very high fire hazard severity zones defined?				
If areas exist with inadequate access/evacuation routes, are they identified? Are mitigation measures or improvement plans identified?				
Are there policies or programs promoting public outreach about defensible space or evacuation routes? Are there specific plans to reach at-risk populations?				
<b>Fire Protection</b>				
Does the plan identify future water supply for fire suppression needs?				
Does new development have adequate fire protection?				
<b>2. Develop adequate infrastructure if a new development is located in SRA or VHFHSZ.</b>				
	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/Recommendations
Does the plan identify adequate infrastructure for new development related to:				
Water supply and fire flow?				
Location of anticipated water supply?				

Maintenance and long-term integrity of water supplies?				
Evacuation and emergency vehicle access?				
Fuel modification and defensible space?				
Vegetation clearance maintenance on public and private roads?				
Visible home and street addressing and signage?				
Are community fire breaks identified in the plan? Is there a discussion of how those fire breaks will be maintained?				
<b>3. Working cooperatively with public agencies responsible for fire protection.</b>				
	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/Recommendations
Is there a map or description of existing emergency service facilities and areas lacking service, specifically noting any areas in SRA or VHFHSZs?				
Does the plan include an assessment and projection of future emergency service needs?				
Is the adequacy of emergency service training described?				
Does the plan outline inter-agency preparedness coordination and mutual aid multi-agency agreements?				

**Safety Element Recommendations**

Specific policies, objectives, or implementation measures that may be used to meet the intent of GOV §§ 65302(g)(3) and 65302.5(b). Safety element reviewers may make recommendations that are not included here.

**A. Maps, Plans and Historical Information**

1. Include or reference CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps or locally adopted wildfire hazard zones.
2. Include or reference the location of historical information on wildfires in the planning area.
3. Include a map or description of the location of existing and planned land uses in SRA and VHFHZs, particularly habitable structures, roads, utilities, and essential public facilities.
4. Identify or reference a fire plan that is relevant to the geographic scope of the general plan, including the Unit/Contract County Fire Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, and any applicable Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
5. Align the goals, policies, objectives, and implementation measures for fire hazard mitigation in the safety element with those in existing fire plans, or make plans to update fire plans to match the safety element.
6. Create a fire plan for the planning area.

**B. Land Use**

1. Develop fire safe development codes to use as standards for fire protection for new development in State Responsibility Area or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones that meet or exceed the statewide minimums in 14 CCR § 1270 et seq.
2. Adopt and have certified by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection local ordinances which meet or exceed the minimum statewide standards in 14 CCR § 1270 et seq.
3. Identify existing development that do not meet or exceed 14 CCR § 1270 or certified local ordinances.
4. Develop mitigation measures for existing development that does not meet or exceed 14 CCR § 1270 or certified local ordinances or identify a policy to do so.

**C. Fuel Modification**

1. Develop a policy to communicate vegetation clearance requirements to seasonal, absent, or vacation rental owners.
2. Identify a policy for the ongoing maintenance of vegetation clearance on public and private roads.
3. Include fuel breaks in the layout/siting of subdivisions.
4. Identify a policy for the ongoing maintenance of existing or proposed fuel breaks.
5. Identify and/or map existing development that does not conform to current fire safety standards for access, water flow, signing, and vegetation clearance in SRA or VHFHZs.
6. Identify plans and actions for existing non-conforming development to be improved or mitigated to meet current fire safety standards for access, water flow, signing, and vegetation clearance.

**D. Access**

1. Develop a policy that approval of parcel maps and tentative maps in SRA or VHFHZ is conditional based on meeting the regulations adopted pursuant to PRC § 4290 and 4291, particularly those regarding road standards for ingress, egress, and fire equipment access (see GOV § 66474.02).
2. Develop a policy that development will be prioritized in areas with an adequate road network and associated infrastructure.
3. Identify multi-family housing, group homes, or other community housing in SRA or VHFHZ and develop a policy to create evacuation or shelter in place plans.

4. Include a policy to develop pre-plans for fire risk areas that address civilian evacuation and to effectively communicate those plans.
5. Identify road networks in SRA or VHFHZ that do not meet 14 CCR § 1270 or certified local ordinance and develop a policy to examine possible mitigations.

**E. Fire Protection**

1. Develop a policy that development will be prioritized in areas with adequate water supply infrastructure.
2. Plan for the ongoing maintenance and long-term integrity of planned and existing water supply infrastructure.
3. Map existing emergency service facilities and note any areas lacking service, especially in SRA or VHFHZ.
4. Project future emergency service needs for the planned land uses.
5. Include information about emergency service trainings or standards and plans to meet or maintain them.
6. Include information about inter-agency preparedness coordination or mutual aid agreements.

**Fire Hazard Planning in Other Elements of the General Plan**  
When updating the General Plan, here are some ways to incorporate fire hazard planning into other elements.

**Land Use Element**

1. Goals and policies include mitigation of fire hazard for future development or limit development in very high fire hazard severity zones.
2. Disclose wildland urban-interface hazards, including fire hazard severity zones, and/or other vulnerable areas as determined by CAL FIRE or local fire agency.
3. Design and locate new development to provide adequate infrastructure for the safe ingress of emergency response vehicles and simultaneously allow citizen egress during emergencies.
4. Describe or map any Firewise Communities or other fire safe communities as determined by the National Fire Protection Association, Fire Safe Council, or other organization.

**Housing Element**

1. Incorporation of current fire safe building codes.
2. Identify and mitigate substandard fire safe housing and neighborhoods relative to fire hazard severity zones.
3. Consider diverse occupancies and their effects on wildfire protection (group housing, seasonal populations, transit-dependent, etc).

**Open Space and Conservation Elements**

1. Identify critical natural resource values relative to fire hazard severity zones.
2. Include resource management activities to enhance protection of open space and natural resource values.
3. Integrate open space into fire safety planning and effectiveness.
4. Mitigation for unique pest, disease and other forest health issues leading to hazardous situations.

**Circulation Element**

1. Provide adequate access to very high fire hazard severity zones.
2. Develop standards for evacuation of residential areas in very high fire hazard severity zones.
3. Incorporate a policy that provides for a fuel reduction maintenance program along roadways.