

**BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION**

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March 4, 2010

Mr. Derek Johnson  
Director of the Office of Long Range Planning  
30 East. Figueroa St. 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: General Plan Fire Safety Element Recommendations

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) is required to review and provide recommendations to the safety element of county and local government general plans when such plans are being updated. This review is in accordance with Government Code (GC) §65302.5 which requires the Board to review the fire safety element when the general plan update contains State Responsibility Areas or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

Enclosed is a list of standard recommendations titled "*General Plan Fire Safety Elements Standard Recommendations*" which should be incorporated into the General Plan. Each entity should evaluate their general plan and include the appropriate recommendations from the list.

Please note requirements for response pursuant to GC §65302.5(b). Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your planning process. We hope this input leads to greater protection and reduced cost and losses from wildfires in your jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stan Dixon".

Stan Dixon  
Chair, State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection

# General Plan Fire Safety Element

## Standard Recommendations

January 26, 2010

State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection



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**Purpose and Background:** The State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (BOF/Board) is required to review and make recommendations to the fire safety element of general plan updates in accordance with Government Code (GC) §65302.5. The review and recommendations apply to those general plans with State Responsibility Area (SRA) (Public Resources Code 4125) or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) (GC 51175).

The statutory requirements for the Board review and recommendations pursuant to GC 65302.5 (a)(1) and (2), and (b) are as follows:

- *“The draft elements...to the fire safety element of a county’s or a city’s general plan...shall be submitted to the Board at least 90 days prior to... the adoption or amendment to the safety element of its general plan [for each county or city with SRA or VHFHSZ].”*
- *“The Board shall... review the draft or an existing safety element and report its written recommendations to the planning agency within 60 days of its receipt of the draft or existing safety element....”*
- *“Prior to adoption of the draft element..., the Board of Supervisors... shall consider the recommendations made by the Board... If the Board of Supervisors...determines not to accept all or some of the recommendations...,” the Board of Supervisors... shall communicate in writing to the Board its reasons for not accepting the recommendations.*

**Methodology for Review and Recommendations:** The Board established a standardized method to review the safety element of general plans. The methodology includes 1) examining the general plan for inclusion of factors that are important for mitigation of fire hazard and risks, and 2) making recommendations related to these factors. The evaluation factors and recommendations were developed using CAL FIRE technical documents and input from local fire departments.

Enclosed are the entire set of recommendations suggested by the Board’s for any entity. Each entity should evaluate their general plan using the factors and include the appropriate recommendations from the list as part of the general plan.

# Standard List of General Plan Safety Element Recommendations

## 1.0 Wildfire Protection Planning

- 1.1 General Plan References and Incorporates County or Unit Fire Plan:  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Identify, reference or create (if necessary) a fire plan for the geographic scope of the General Plan. General Plan (GP) should incorporate the general concepts and standards from any county fire plan, fire protection agency (federal or state) fire plan, and local hazard mitigation plan.

**Recommendation:** Ensure fire plans incorporated by reference into the GP contain evaluations of fire hazards, assessment of assets at risk, prioritization of hazard mitigation actions, and implementation and monitoring components.

## 2.0 Land Use Planning:

- 2.1 Goals and policies include mitigation of fire hazard for future development.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for specific ordinances addressing evacuation and emergency vehicle access; water supplies and fire flow; fuel modification for defensible space; and home addressing and signing.

**Recommendation:** Develop fire safe development codes used as standards for fire protection for new development in State Responsibility Area (SRA) within the entity's jurisdiction that meet or exceed statewide standards in 14 California Code of Regulations Section 1270 et seq.

**Recommendation:** Adopt, and have certified by the BOF, local fire safe ordinances which meet or exceed standards in 14 CCR § 1270 for State Responsibility Area.

- 2.2 Disclosure of wildland urban interface hazards including Fire Hazard Severity Zones designations and Communities at Risk designations:  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Specify whether the entity has a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) designation pursuant GC 51175 and include a map of the zones that clearly indicates any area designated VHFHSZ.

**Recommendation:** Adopt CAL FIRE recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones including model ordinances developed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal for establishing VHFHSZ areas.

**Recommendation:** Identify and disclose information on communities listed as "Communities at Risk".

### 3.0 Housing/structures and neighborhoods:

- 3.1 Incorporation of current fire safe building codes.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Adopt building codes for new development in State Responsibility Areas or incorporated areas with VHFHSZ that are established by the Office of the State Fire Marshal in Title 19 and Title 24 CCR, referred to as the “Wildland Urban Interface Building Codes”.

- 3.2 Identification and actions for substandard fire safe housing and neighborhoods relative to fire hazard area.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Identify and map existing housing structures that do not conform to contemporary fire standards in terms of building materials, perimeter access, and vegetative hazards in VHFHSZ or SRA by fire hazard zone designation.

**Recommendation:** Identify plans and actions to improve substandard housing structures and neighborhoods. Plans and actions should include structural rehabilitation, occupancy reduction, demolition, reconstruction, neighborhood –wide fuels hazard reduction projects, community education, and other community based solutions.

**Recommendation:** Identify plans and actions for existing residential structures and neighborhoods, and particularly substandard residential structures and neighborhoods, to be improved to meet current fire safe ordinances pertaining to access, water flow, signing, and vegetation clearing.

- 3.3 Consideration of occupancy category effects on wildfire protection.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Ensure risks to uniquely occupied structures, such as seasonally occupied homes, multiple dwelling structures, or other structures with unique occupancy characteristics, are considered for appropriate and unique wildfire protection needs.

- 3.4 Fire engineering features for structures in VHFHSZ.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Ensure new development proposals contain specific fire protection plans, actions, and codes for fire engineering features for structures in VHFHSZ. Examples include codes requiring automatic sprinklers in VHFHSZ.

#### **4.0 Conservation and Open Space:**

4.1 Identification of critical natural resource values relative to fire hazard areas.

Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Identify critical natural resources and other “open space” values within the geographic scope of the GP. Determine maximum acceptable wildfire size, fire prevention plans, emergency response plans and initial attack suppression success rates for protection of these areas and values.

4.2 Inclusion of resource management activities to enhance protection of open space and natural resource values.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Develop plans and action for vegetation management that provides fire damage mitigation and protection of open space values. Plans should address protection of natural resource financial values, establishment of fire resilient natural resources, protection of watershed qualities, and protection of endangered species habitats. Actions should consider prescribed burning, fuel breaks, vegetation thinning and removal

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for reducing the wildland fire hazards within the entity’s boundaries and on adjacent private wildlands, federal lands, vacant residential lots, and greenbelts with fire hazards that threaten the entity’s jurisdiction.

4.3 Mitigation for unique pest, disease and other forest health issues leading to hazardous situations.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies that address unique pest, disease, exotic species and other forest health issues in open space areas for purposes of reducing fire hazard and supporting ecological integrity.

4.4 Integration of open space into fire safety effectiveness.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for incorporating systematic fire protection improvements for open space. Specifics policies should address facilitation of safe fire suppression tactics, standards for adequate access for firefighting, fire mitigation planning with agencies/private landowners managing open space adjacent to the GP area, water sources for fire suppression, and other fire prevention and suppression needs.

4.5 Urban forestry plans relative to fire protection:  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Ensure residential areas have appropriate fire resistant landscapes and discontinuous vegetation adjacent to open space or wildland areas.

**Recommendation:** Evaluate and resolve existing laws and local ordinances which conflict with fire protection requirements. Examples include conflicts with vegetation hazard reduction ordinances and listed species habitat protection requirements.

## 5. Circulation and Access:

- 5.1 Adequacy of existing and future transportation system to incorporate fire infrastructure elements.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for proposed and existing transportation systems to facilitate fire infrastructure elements such as turnouts, helispots and safety zones.

- 5.2 Adequate access to high hazard wildland/open space areas.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for high or very high fire hazard hazard zones adequate access that meets or exceeds standards in 14 CCR 1270 for lands with no structures, and maintain conditions of access in a suitable fashion for suppression access or public evacuation.

- 5.3 Standards for evacuation of residential areas in high hazard areas.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Goals and policies should be established to delineate residential evacuation routes and evacuation plans in high or very high fire hazard residential areas.

## 6. Defensible Space

- 6.1 Geographic specific fire risk reduction mitigation measures using fuel modification.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Include policies and recommendations that incorporate fire safe buffers and greenbelts as part of the development planning. Ensure that land uses designated near high or very fire hazard severity zones are compatible with wildland fire protection strategies/capabilities.

- 6.2 Fuel Modification around homes.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish ordinances in SRA or VHFHSZ for vegetation fire hazard reduction around structures that meet or exceed the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's Defensible Space Guidelines, ([http://www.bof.fire.ca.gov/pdfs/Copyof4291finalguidelines9\\_29\\_06.pdf](http://www.bof.fire.ca.gov/pdfs/Copyof4291finalguidelines9_29_06.pdf)) for SRA.

- 6.3 Fire suppression defense zones.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies that create wildfire defense zones for emergency services including fuel breaks, back fire areas, or other staging areas that support safe fire suppression activities.

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies that identify structures (or other critical/valuable assets) that have adequate fuel modification or other fire safe features that provide adequate fire

fighter safety when tactics call for protection of a specific asset (i.e. which houses are safe to protect).

## 7.0 **Emergency Services:**

7.1 Map/description of existing emergency service facilities and areas lacking services:

Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Include descriptions of emergency services including available equipment, personnel, and maps of facilities.

**Recommendation:** Initiate studies and analyses to identify appropriate staffing levels and equipment needs commensurate with the current and projected emergency response environment.

7.2 Assessment and projection of future emergency service needs:  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Ensure new development includes appropriate facilities, equipment, personnel and capacity to assist and support wildfire suppression emergency service needs. Future emergency service needs should be:

- Established consistent with state or national standards.
- develop based on criteria for determining suppression resource allocation that includes elements such as identified values and assets at risk, ignition density, vegetation type and condition, as well as local weather and topography.
- Local Agency Formation municipal services reviews for evaluating level of service, response times, equipments condition levels and other relevant emergency service information.

7.3 Adequacy of training.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for emergency service training that meets or exceeds state or national standards.

7.4 Inter-fire service coordination preparedness/mutual aid and multi-jurisdictional fire service agreements.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Adopt the Standardized Emergency Management Systems for responding to large scale disasters requiring a multi-agency response. Ensure and review mutual aid/automatic aid and other cooperative agreements with adjoining emergency service providers.

**8.0 Post Fire Safety, Recovery and Maintenance:** The post fire recommendations address an opportunity for the community and landowners to re-evaluate land uses and practices that affect future wildfire hazards and risk. They also provide for immediate post-fire life and safety considerations to mitigate potential losses to life, human assets and critical natural resources.

8.1 Reevaluate hazard conditions and provide for future fire safe conditions  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Incorporate goals and policies that provide for reassessment of fire hazards following wildfire events. Adjust fire prevention and suppression needs commensurate for both short and long term fire protection needs.

8.2 **Recommendation:** Develop burn area recovery plans that incorporate strategic fire safe measures developed during the fire suppression, such as access roads, fire lines, safety zones, and fuelbreaks, and helispots.

8.3 Restore sustainable landscapes and restore functioning ecosystems.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Develop burn area recovery plans, evaluation processes and implementation actions that encourage tree and biomass salvage, reforestation activities, create resilient and sustainable landscapes, and restore functioning ecosystems.

8.4 Incorporate wildlife habitat/endangered species considerations  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies for consideration of wildlife habitat//endangered species into long term fire area recovery and protection plans, including environmental protection agreements such as natural community conservation plans.

8.5 Native species reintroduction.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Incorporate native species habitat needs as part of long term fire protection and fire restoration plans.

8.6 Evaluation of redevelopment.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** In High and Very hazardous areas, ensure redevelopment utilizes state of the art fire resistant building and development standards to improve past ‘substandard’ fire safe conditions.

8.7 Long term maintenance of fire hazard reduction mitigation projects  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Provide polices and goals for maintenance of the post-fire-recovery projects, activities, or infrastructure.

8.8 Post fire life and safety assessments  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Develop frameworks for rapid post-fire assessment and project implementation to minimize flooding, protect water quality, limit sediment flows and reduce other risks on all land ownerships impacted by wildland fire.

**Recommendation:** Identify flood and landslide vulnerability areas related to post wildfire conditions.

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies that address the intersection of flood /landslide/post fire burn areas into long term public safety protection plans. These should include treatment assessment of fire related flood risk to life, methods to control storm runoff in burn areas, revegetation of burn areas, and drainage crossing debris maintenance.

**Recommendation:** Encourage rapid post-fire assessment, as appropriate, and project implementation to minimize flooding, protect water quality, limit sediment flows and reduce other risks on all land ownerships impacted by wildland fire.

## 9. Terrorist and homeland security impacts on wildfire protection

These recommendations are included to address fire protection needs related to terrorist acts or other homeland security preparedness and response actions. Both preparedness and incident response can adversely impact fire protection. Adverse effects include substantially decreasing emergency resources' availability, responsiveness and effectiveness by diverting resources, interrupting communications, or restricting emergency access.

9.1 Communication channels during incidences.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Establish goals and policies consistent with the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission of 2005 for communications and interoperability. Example goals and policies should address fire personnel capability to communicate effectively across multiple frequency bands and update and expansion of current handheld and mobile radios used on major mutual aid incidents.

9.2 Emergency response barriers.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Identify goals and policies that address vital access routes that if removed would prevent fire fighter access (bridges, dams, etc.). Develop an alternative emergency access plan for these areas.

9.3 Prioritizing asset protection from fire with lack of suppression forces.  Yes  Partial  No

**Recommendation:** Identify and prioritize protection needs for assets at risk in the absence of response forces.

**Recommendation:** Establish fire defense strategies (such as fire ignition resistant areas) that provide adequate fire protection without dependency on air attack and could serve as survivor safety zones for the public or emergency support personnel.