

McGuire introduces bill establishing sweeping new fire safety standards for building safely in high fire risk areas

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In this first week of the new legislative session, State Sen. Mike McGuire, whose North Coast district includes Del Norte County and has been ravaged by wildfires, is introducing landmark legislation to confront California's increasing wildfire risk by establishing sweeping new safety standards for developments in high risk wildfire areas.

"Over the last six years, I have seen too much destruction and pain caused by this era of mega fires. Wildfires have clearly now become a risk to the long-term livelihoods of millions of Californians. We must change the way we build in high fire risk zones, and if certain commonsense health and safety requirements can't be met, we shouldn't be building at all," McGuire said.

SB 12 advances sweeping new fire hazard planning responsibilities for local and state governments by requiring cities and counties to create fire safety standards prior to permitting development in very high fire

risk areas.

As of 2010, California had 4.5 million homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface; 2 million of those are at high or extreme risk from wildfire, according to a 2018 analysis by Verisk, a data analytics firm.

“California’s largest, most destructive, and deadly wildland fires have all taken place in the last decade — with over 38,000 homes and other structures being destroyed by California wildfires since 2015,” McGuire said. “As climate change deepens and the hots grow hotter, the hazard wildfire poses to California communities is greater than ever before. We have to take decisive action now, lives literally depend on it.”

SB 12 presents a comprehensive approach to ensuring data driven, fire-safe development. This would include providing enhanced ingress and egress routes (mandating primary and secondary access roads) along with mandated public safety vehicle access. Mandated funding mechanisms for defensible space maintenance and vegetation management is embedded in this legislation.

The legislation also implements specific wildfire risk reduction standards that a development must meet prior to approval including building units on the lowest risk zones of the property and mandating evacuation plans. The State Fire Marshal would also be required to develop additional wildfire risk reduction standards that local governments would need to be abide by.

Importantly, SB 12 prohibits local agencies from approving developments that aren’t adequately protected from fire hazards and don’t meet the new standards established in this bill. SB 12 doesn’t say that communities can’t develop, but it does tell them that they have to do it safely using the new and aggressive wildfire risk reduction standards listed in this legislation.

SB 12 is being co-authored by Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins and Senators Bill Dodd and Anna Caballero. The bill will head to Senate committees in the spring.