

Q&A – Insurance and CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps

1. How will the updated CAL FIRE maps affect insurance availability and affordability?

CAL FIRE’s maps are intended to drive local planning decisions, not insurance decisions. Under Commissioner Lara’s new regulation finalized in October 2022, insurance companies must provide discounts for wildfire safety actions such as community mitigation and home-hardening, which CAL FIRE’s maps do not assess. In addition, insurance companies are already using risk analysis tools and models that go beyond CAL FIRE’s proposed maps in determining what properties they will underwrite.

Commissioner Lara’s new wildfire safety regulation will help increase access to insurance by promoting wildfire safety across the state. Reducing wildfire risks throughout the state is the primary way we can make insurance more available and affordable, and our regulation is a major step towards that goal. CAL FIRE’s maps support that goal through improving public education about hazard and the need for safety preparation.

2. How will these maps benefit the public?

Public education about where current wildfire hazards exist is essential to reducing the threat to local communities and maintaining access to available and affordable insurance. When communities know and understand their risks, they can plan and prepare.

In addition, the Department’s [first-ever report on climate insurance](#) recommended updated wildfire hazard mapping to improve public safety.

3. If you are a homeowner and your zone changed from High Hazard to Very High Hazard, will this impact your insurance premiums or renewal ability?

For many years, insurance companies have been using alternate wildfire risk tools for determining where they will write and renew policies, and how much premium to charge a policyholder, not the Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps. Therefore, a change in designation on the maps for a single homeowner is unlikely to affect their insurance. The reality is that more accurate risk information enables homeowners and communities to reduce their wildfire risks, and Commissioner Lara’s new wildfire mitigation regulation clarifies what actions you should take to reduce wildfire risks. Once that regulation is fully implemented, if a homeowner or business owner takes those risk mitigation actions, they will be able to see a discount in their insurance premium.

4. How is the state addressing wildfire mitigation?

By design, CAL FIRE's maps are focused on long-range wildfire hazard, which includes only certain variables, like wind, vegetation, ember production and movement, climate, topography, and fire history. CAL FIRE's maps will give up to date information to communities about the level of wildfire hazard they face, which could help target resources at the state and local level. Expanded state grant programs and Commissioner Lara's new wildfire safety regulation are aimed at reducing wildfire risks to communities through programs such as Firewise USA and the new Fire Risk Reduction Community designation from the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection.