

# WILDFIRE & HOUSING SERIES

## How to Preserve & Protect Housing



Technical Assistance  
for Local Planning  
**HOUSING**

The series provided resources for local planning and housing staff working to integrate wildfire and housing issues in local land use planning efforts like the Housing and Safety Element updates. Four virtual workshops were held with national and state experts presenting current information and best practices, case studies and recent experiences. These sessions helped local agencies gain a better understanding of the evolution and behavior of wildfires, defensible space, home hardening, new evacuations laws and modeling approaches, and responsive land use planning in the wildland urban interface (WUI). Each session included Resource Guides with practical takeaway information and helpful background materials.



### ABAG TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PORTAL

Find all wildfire workshop presentations, recordings, and resource guides at:  
<https://abag.ca.gov/technical-assistance/wildfires-how-preserve-protect-housing>



## WILDFIRE & HOUSING WORKSHOP SERIES

### WORKSHOP #1 WILDFIRES & HOUSING 101

Overview of fire behavior and the fire science around how homes ignite in wildfires, plus introduction of Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority.

### WORKSHOP #2 DEFENSIBLE SPACE & HOME HARDENING

Deep dive into defensible space & home hardening approaches with updates from CAL FIRE plus practical resident guidance.

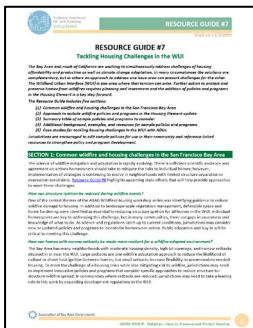
### WORKSHOP #3 EVACUATIONS: LAWS & TECHNOLOGY

Exploration of new evacuation laws: SB 99 triggered by Housing Element and AB 747 triggered by LHMP. OPR updates, and approaches to evacuation modeling.

### WORKSHOP #4 LAND USE PLANNING IN THE WUI + ADUS

Discussion of housing policy and program approaches for housing in the WUI. Overview of anticipated 2022 wildfire guidance from CAL FIRE and OPR.

## WILDFIRE & HOUSING RESOURCE GUIDES



- ✓ [1 - Wildfires – Research, Science & Key Organizations](#)
- ✓ [2 - Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority \(MWPA\)](#)
- ✓ [3 - Home Hardening and Defensible Space Resources for Residents](#)
- ✓ [4 - Fire Safe Marin’s Collaborative Wildfire Public Education and Programs](#)
- ✓ [5 - New Evacuation Laws, Key Considerations and Planning Resources](#)
- ✓ [6 - Coming Soon 2022 – State Resources](#)
- ✓ [7 - Tackling Housing Challenges in the WUI](#)

## OTHER RESILIENCE RESOURCES FOR YOUR HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE

In Summer 2021, MTC/ABAG created non-wildfire specific tools to help communities integrate resilience into their Housing Element Update. The resources are organized into four steps and with an [instruction guide](#) offering a step-by-step approach:



**Step 1. Consider how your city plans to achieve resilience action.**

**Resource:** [5-page briefer](#) to guide concurrent General Plan Element Updates with a review of state requirements, plan status, and considerations.



**Step 2. Explore how exposed your existing housing is to hazards.**

**Resource:** [Excel spreadsheet](#) that tabulates the exposure of existing zoned housing to wildfire, flooding, and sea level rise.



**Step 3. When possible, site future housing away from the most hazardous sites.**

**Resource:** [The Housing Element Site Selection \(HESS\)](#) tool includes a set of seismic and climate impact layers to inform decisions of siting new housing.



**Step 4. Consider resilient policies to address existing or future housing risks.**

**Resource:** [The Resilient Housing Policy Document](#) is a policy menu that can be a starting point to craft resilient Housing Element policies.

# WILDFIRE ADAPTATION MOVING FORWARD

The Bay Area and much of California are working to simultaneously address challenges of housing affordability and production as well as climate change adaptation. In many circumstances the solutions are complementary, but in others an approach to address one issue area can present challenges for the other. Below are key challenges that Bay Area communities face with sample housing element responses to consider. This information is a sample of the information provided in [Resource Guide #7](#).



## CHALLENGE #1

### Reduce the ignition of homes in wildfire events.

**Background:** As science and regulations catch up to current conditions, jurisdictions may consider new or updated policies and programs to reduce structure ignition for homes in the WUI, focusing on approaches that reduce ember-caused ignitions.



**Implement expanded state laws that increase wildfire standards for housing.** New wildfire severity maps, new application of those maps to additional severity zones, and regulation updates will increase the geographic extent and intensity of wildfire-specific building and development standards. Acknowledge that minimum requirements are expanding and that without any special local action a jurisdiction will be doing more to ensure a more wildfire-adapted community.



**Engage and educate residents on policy changes and upcoming program opportunities.** Develop a public engagement and education strategy to educate residents, contractors, and developers about recent changes. Work with community partners, local officials, and non-profit organizations.



## CHALLENGE #2

### Make homes with narrow setbacks more resilient to wildfires.

**Background:** Jurisdictions may consider specific approaches to reduce structure-to-structure wildfire radiant heat spread for pre-existing properties or for new/expanded development with narrow setbacks between homes.



**Implement/Update a home hardening and defensible space program to preserve existing housing.** Implement baseline defensible space and home hardening guidance as the first step for all homes, including those with narrow setbacks.



**Develop a “Wildfire Reach Code” to direct action in areas with reduced structure separation.** Consider posting homeowner guidance or amend Chapter 7A of the building code for homes with narrow setbacks. Guidance or code changes could include higher standards for windows and siding on the building face with narrow setbacks.



## CHALLENGE #3

### Improve actual evacuation times in an emergency.

**Background:** Jurisdictions may choose to study and implement responsive strategies to ensure sufficient right-of-way and evacuation network capacity to address evacuation concerns about adding new housing, especially in the WUI. For many, evacuation studies and analysis are an important first step to support existing and future residents and first responders.



**Use local knowledge to develop a wildfire zone overlay that incorporates transportation infrastructure.** Use CAL FIRE wildfire hazard severity zones and local information to refine overlay zones. Use transportation infrastructure to identify locations with fire hazard and constrained evacuation egress to influence corresponding policy decisions.



**Perform an evacuation assessment.** Many communities will make housing decisions before complying with evacuation analysis required by AB 747 and AB 1409. Point to this forthcoming analysis and use it to identify chokepoints and to study responsive solutions.



## CHALLENGE #4

### Individual plus community action together for wildfire adaptation.

**Background:** Many housing-related wildfire adaptation actions are the responsibility of individuals, but wildfire risk is shared on a neighborhood/community level. To adapt to wildfire, collective action is needed on the community level between residents, community-based organizations, and the jurisdiction itself.



**Promote neighborhood-based wildfire centered networks.** Leverage existing neighborhood-based organizations or foster new neighborhood-wide networks in areas with wildfire hazard. Use pre-existing events to build awareness and consider possible program offerings like defensible space chipper programs.



**Explore if a multi-jurisdictional network is needed.** Multi-jurisdictional approaches like Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (see [Resource Guide #2](#)) can advance actions at the scale that is needed. Think broader to transform local wildfire adaptation capacity, funding, and collaboration which could unlock larger state resources for action.