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AB-441 Wildfire prevention: Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development: wildfire mitigation program. (2025-2026)

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AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 23, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

NO. 441

Introduced by Assembly Member Hadwick

February 06, 2025

An act to amend Sections 8586.8 and 8654.10 of the Government Code, relating to wildfire prevention.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 441, as amended, Hadwick. Wildfire prevention: Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development: wildfire mitigation program.

(1) Existing law establishes the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development in state government within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to study, test, and advise regarding procurement of emerging technologies and tools in order to more effectively prevent and suppress wildfires within the state. For those purposes, existing law requires the office to, among other things, develop a balanced, multimodal research and development program designed to identify, research, test, and evaluate emerging technologies and tools designed to improve the state's preparation for, and response to, wildfires in the state, as specified. Existing law repeals these provisions on January 1, 2029.

This bill would extend the repeal date of the above provisions to January 1, ~~2033~~ 2031.

(2) Existing law, upon appropriation of the Legislature, requires the Office of Emergency Services to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program. Existing law requires the department to delegate its duties and responsibilities for this program to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Existing law requires the State Fire Marshal, in consultation with other officials, to identify measures eligible for financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program that are both cost effective and provide for appropriate site or structure fire risk reduction, as specified. Existing law requires the joint powers authority to develop eligibility criteria for property owners, community organizations, and local governments who may receive financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program. Existing law requires the joint powers authority to submit a report to the Legislature regarding the implementation of the wildfire mitigation financial assistance program that includes, among other things, an evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the wildfire mitigation program compared to other structure hardening, defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel reduction

incentive programs and an evaluation of the overall wildfire risk reduction achieved statewide through awards of financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program. Existing law repeals these provisions on July 1, 2029.

This bill would ~~delete the July 1, 2029, repeal date described above, thereby extending these provisions indefinitely.~~ *extend the repeal date of the above provisions to July 1, 2031.*

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 8586.8 of the Government Code is amended to read:

8586.8. (a) For purposes of this section, "office" means the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development.

(b) The Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development is hereby established in state government within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to study, test, and advise regarding procurement of emerging technologies and tools in order to more effectively prevent and suppress wildfires within the state. The office shall serve as the central organizing hub for the state government's identification of emerging wildfire technologies.

(c) The office shall be under the direct control of the Director of Forestry and Fire Protection.

(d) The office shall undertake, but is not limited to, the following activities:

(1) Develop a balanced, multimodal research and development program designed to identify, research, test, and evaluate emerging technologies and tools designed to improve the state's preparation for, and response to, wildfires in the state, including, but not limited to, fire retardants and ground, aerial, mobile, portable, communication, predictive modeling, software, or stationary equipment used for California's wildfire preparedness and by first responders.

(2) Consult with public, private, and nonprofit entities in identifying new technologies tools, software, and other advances in wildfire preparedness and response.

(3) Make recommendations to state and local agencies on the most effective and useful technologies and tools for procurement.

(e) The office shall be subject to review by the Wildfire Technology Research and Development Review Advisory Board, which shall serve in an advisory capacity, and shall consist of the following nine members:

(1) The Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, or their designee.

(2) The Director of the Office of Emergency Services, or their designee.

(3) The Director of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or their designee.

(4) Four members who are appointed by the Governor for a term of four years each, as follows:

(A) One representative from academia involved in the field of wildfire research and technology development.

(B) One representative from the private wildfire response science, engineering, and technology industry.

(C) One representative from local government.

(D) One member of the public employed as a first responder.

(5) One member who is appointed by the Senate for a term of four years who is involved in victim services.

(6) One member who is appointed by the Assembly for a term of four years who is involved in the protection of privacy and civil liberties.

(f) The board shall meet at least four times per year to review, analyze, and assess the activities and progress of the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development, and to consult with public, private, and nonprofit entities regarding their interaction and responsiveness of the office.

(1) The findings and recommendations of the board shall be compiled and delivered to the office of the Governor and the Legislature as a report no later than January 1, 2024, and annually thereafter.

(2) The report developed by the board pursuant to this section shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795.

(g) Members of the board shall serve without compensation, but they may be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred in connection with their duties.

(h) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, ~~2033~~, 2031, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 2. Section 8654.10 of the Government Code is amended to read:

8654.10. (a) The operation of this article is contingent upon an appropriation by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act or another statute for purposes of this article.

(b) No later than July 1, 2028, the joint powers authority shall submit a report to the Legislature, in compliance with Section 9795, regarding the implementation of the wildfire mitigation financial assistance program administered pursuant to this article. The report shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following:

(1) An evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the wildfire mitigation program compared to other structure hardening, defensible space, vegetation management, and fuel reduction incentive programs.

(2) An evaluation of the overall wildfire risk reduction achieved statewide through awards of financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program.

(3) Detailed information about the quantity, monetary value, geographic distribution, and categories of awards of financial assistance made under the wildfire mitigation program.

(4) Detailed information about the sources and amounts of funds appropriated or granted to the wildfire mitigation program.

(5) Detailed information about barriers encountered to completing work awarded financial assistance under the wildfire mitigation program, including state, regional, or local permitting requirements.

(6) Any other information the Office of Emergency Services determines is necessary or convenient to evaluate the financial assistance awarded under the program.

(c) This article shall remain in effect only until July 1, 2031, and as of that date is repealed.