

## **Editorial: After the wildfires, state left with bills**

In the third year of a statewide drought, California faces increasing risk of wildfire. That's why it is important to control new housing development in wildfire zones.

The reality is that year after year, cities and counties approve new subdivisions in remote canyons and forests in high fire-hazard zones without ensuring adequate local fire protection. They assume that outside firefighters will help when disaster strikes – costing the state more than \$300 million a year.

**Assemblyman Dave Jones, D-Sacramento**, has introduced Assembly Bill 666 that would do for fire-prone areas what the state already does for flood-prone areas. Just as new developments in flood-prone areas have to show adequate flood protection, new developments in fire-prone areas would have to show adequate fire protection.

Jones' bill would require counties faced with projects in fire-prone areas to:

- Certify that sufficient fire protection services are available through the county, city, special district, or through contracts with the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection;
- Follow state fire regulations on roads, turnarounds, defensible space and emergency water systems;
- Prohibit dead-end subdivisions that lack two access roads for emergency equipment and evacuations. The bill allows an exception for new subdivisions of 30 or fewer lots where topographic features or land ownership patterns prevent two access roads – a less-than-ideal compromise.

Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed an earlier bill, saying it would place the state fire agency in the “unenviable position” of having to verify whether subdivisions had sufficient structural fire protection. That's not in AB 666. He did say he was willing to work with legislators this session to get a bill passed.

The Assembly Local Government Committee hears AB 666 today. With continuing drought conditions, adequate fire protection in fire-prone areas is essential. Schwarzenegger should live up to his promise to work with legislators to win this bill's approval.