



# California — Building Codes & the Wildland-Urban Interface

## What is California's Building Code and how does it work?

The minimum standards for design and construction of a building - such as the fire safety, structural integrity, and life protection - are outlined in model codes, which are developed through the International Code Council's code development process and serve as a basis for states to adopt. California's building codes - the California Building Standards Code (California Code of Regulations, Title 24) - are a compilation of provisions adopted directly from model codes, amendments to provisions from model codes, and standards that are approved by the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC). Local jurisdictions can then adopt these codes and make further amendments, provided they meet the established minimum standards.<sup>2</sup> California updates the Title 24 triennially, through public engagement, and in 2024, such processes occurred to prepare the state for the adoption of the 2025 edition of Title 24, effective January 1, 2026.

## What is Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)?

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is the zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development. It is the area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with wildland or vegetative fuels that are a fire hazard associated with the built environment.<sup>1</sup>

## What is California's WUI code?

A Wildland-Urban Interface Code, or WUI Code, establishes the minimum requirements for the safeguarding of life and property from the hazards of wildfire in designated WUI areas. These provisions apply to land use – such as defensible space and vegetation management requirements – as well as the built environment – such as outlining methods of construction for exterior wildfire exposure.

WUI provisions can be found in Chapter 7A of the California Building Code, Chapter 49 of the California Fire Code, and Section R337 of the California Residential Code. Chapter 7A has the requirements that apply to buildings in WUI-designated areas while Chapter 49 of the Fire Code contains the minimum requirements to mitigate conditions that might cause a fire to spread to a structure from the landscape, as well as for those features that allow for more effective firefighting operations.

This criteria was initially adopted in 2008 and has undergone multiple revisions as part of the iterative California code development process, integrating the most recent insights and scientific advancements from technical experts in the field. As homes are renovated or built, building them to modern codes and standards ensures that the latest construction methods are used.

## Building codes - A consensus based approach

As building science and research is constantly evolving, consensus code development allows for the latest science and engineering to be continuously incorporated into updated codes every three years so that such codes are never stagnant and reflect the latest research to be used. The codes are developed through the technical expertise of engineers, architects, academics, building code officials, and other industry professionals who provide input during the process. This collaborative process results in structures and communities that benefit from the most up-to-date scientific advancements in fire safety, structural integrity, and life protection.

As such, code development must remain a collective, iterative process allowing balanced input to recognize the latest means and methods of construction. **Thus, aligning legislation with CA Title 24 helps uphold the integrity of the most up to date and informed building and fire science practices.**



## Why does a WUI code matter?

While WUI codes help keep people and property safe they also offer important economic safeguards/benefits in WUI areas. Evidence has indicated that California's WUI provisions effectively mitigate against losses due to wildfire. Homes built prior to the adoption of this criteria are less likely to survive wildfire, and these homes make up a large percentage of the homes in identified fire severity areas.<sup>3</sup> **A McClatchy analysis following the California Camp Fire in October 2018 found that 51% of the structures built after WUI code requirements took effect, escaped damage as compared to 18% of the 12,100 structures built prior.**<sup>4</sup>

From an economic standpoint, new building and home hardening measures that align with the latest WUI codes in effect can help save homeowners, governments and insurance agencies from catastrophic loss. The National Institute of Building Science released a 2019 Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves Report that demonstrated that **adopting and implementing the 2015 International Wildland-Urban Interface Code (IWUIC) saved \$4 for every \$1 invested and that retrofitting structures according to the IWUIC could provide \$2 to as much as \$8 in mitigation benefits for each \$1 invested.**<sup>5</sup>

As part of the triennial code cycle, when the 2025 edition of Title 24 goes into effect in 2026, all the WUI code provisions will be coalesced into their own California Wildland-Urban Interface Code, which will be located in Part 7 of Title 24. Thus, all the measures from Chapter 7A, Chapter 49, and those in the residential code will be contained in this single location moving forward.



## About AWC

The American Wood Council (AWC) represents 87 percent of the U.S. structural wood products industry, including the more than 450,000 men and women who work in mills across the country. As an organization, AWC advocates for a consensus-based building code development process, in which codes are developed collaboratively by code officials, academics, fire service professionals, industry stakeholders, homebuilders, architects, engineers and other interested parties rather than mandated through legislation.



## Notes

1 - U.S. Fire Administration, "What is the WUI?", <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui.html>

2 - California Department of General Service, <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/bsc/codes>

3 - "Build to Survive: Homes in California's Burn Zones Must Adopt Fire-Safe Code", April 22, 2019.

4 - Phillip Reese, "Dissecting Data: Pinpointing Houses Threatened by Wildfire," April 12, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/ca-state-wire-california-wildfires-destined-to-burn-paradise-e688e34240bb4217a13d9ddb5062ffe>

5 - National Institute of Building Science, "Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves", 2019, [https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/NIBS\\_MMC\\_MitigationSaves\\_2019.pdf](https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/NIBS_MMC_MitigationSaves_2019.pdf)