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CalChiefs and IBHS Live Burn Demonstration Will Show Why the First Five Feet Matter in Wildfire Resilience

Side-by-side comparison will show how design and landscaping choices can influence whether wildfire reaches a structure

RICHBURG, S.C., October 26, 2026 – The California Fire Chiefs Association (CalChiefs) Fire Marshal Section and the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) will host a live-fire demonstration to show how choices made around a home can influence its vulnerability to wildfire. The demonstration will compare two side-by-side structures exposed to controlled wildfire conditions. One structure will incorporate key elements of IBHS's voluntary, science-based Wildfire Prepared Home™ standard, including a 5-foot noncombustible zone. The other structure will include common vulnerabilities that can provide pathways for embers, flames and radiant heat to ignite a home.

"Wildfire resilience starts well before a fire reaches a community," said Chief Bernard Molloy II, president of CalChiefs. "This demonstration gives homeowners, fire service leaders, and community decision-makers a clear, real-world look at how practical mitigation choices can strengthen a home's ability to withstand wildfire. The goal is to turn awareness into action before the next fire occurs."

The event comes as California continues to advance wildfire-resilience measures, including new requirements for the first five feet around the home, commonly referred to as Zone 0. IBHS supports the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's (Board's) focus on reducing combustible materials within the first five feet around a structure. At the same time, the Board's Zone 0 regulation and IBHS's Wildfire Prepared Home standard are distinct programs.

The Board's proposed regulation establishes a defensible-space baseline that permits certain qualifying, maintained vegetation in portions of Zone 0. IBHS's Wildfire Prepared Home standard goes further, requiring the first five feet around the home to be free of all combustible materials and vegetation. IBHS research shows this immediate area is especially important because embers and flames can ignite materials near the structure and create pathways for fire to reach vulnerable building

components. For that reason, IBHS continues to support a fully noncombustible first five feet as the strongest approach to interrupting those pathways.

"California's proposed Zone 0 regulation is an important step forward," said Anne Cope, chief engineer at IBHS. "Our research supports keeping the entire first five feet free of combustible materials and vegetation, while also addressing vulnerabilities in the roof, vents, and other building components. Together, these measures reduce opportunities for embers and flames to ignite a home."

The live burn demonstration will also underscore why wildfire resilience extends beyond a single structure. While reducing vulnerabilities at and immediately around the home is critical, the benefits are greater when those actions are repeated across neighboring properties and throughout a community.

"A home does not face wildfire in isolation," said Roy Wright, president and CEO of IBHS. "What happens on one property can affect the next, which is why mitigation must advance house by house, block by block, and neighborhood by neighborhood. When homeowners across a neighborhood reduce vulnerabilities in and around their homes, those collective actions can reduce ignition opportunities and help limit fire spread from one property to the next."

Turning those individual actions into community-wide resilience requires coordination among everyone who shapes how homes are built, maintained and protected.

"Building a more wildfire-resilient California requires action at every level—from homeowners and builders to local leaders and the fire service," said Chief Daniel Berlant, California state fire marshal. "Demonstrations like this help show why the decisions we make before a wildfire matter. The more we can reduce vulnerabilities in and around homes, the better positioned our communities will be to withstand wildfire."

For more information about the Wildfire Prepared Home program, visit wildfireprepared.org.

About the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS)

The IBHS mission is to conduct objective, scientific research to identify and promote effective actions that strengthen homes, businesses and communities against natural disasters and other causes of loss. Learn more about IBHS at ibhs.org.

About Wildfire Prepared Home

Wildfire Prepared Home is a science-based wildfire mitigation designation program. Driven by the latest wildfire research conducted by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS), it offers

California homeowners a path to reduce wildfire risk by taking proven, science-backed mitigation actions. Learn more at wildfireprepared.org.

About California Fire Chiefs Association (CalChiefs) Fire Marshal Section

The California Fire Chiefs Association Fire Marshals Section works collaboratively with the CalChiefs Borad of Directors to advance the interests of California's fire prevention and fire service community. The Section provides a statewide forum for first marshals and fire prevention professionals to share best practices, address emerging issues, and strengthen fire and life safety across California.

Through training, professional development, advocacy, and collaboration, the Section equips fire service leaders with the knowledge, resources, and connections needed to protect their communities and advance the California fire service.

President: James Gillespie, Fire Marshal, Murrieta Fire Protection District