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FIRST HOME HARDENED AGAINST WILDFIRE IN LAKE COUNTY

The California Wildfire Mitigation Program leverages federal and state funds to support defensible space and ignition resistant retrofits in six vulnerable California counties

Lake County – In an effort to protect homes in California’s most vulnerable communities, state officials celebrated Thursday the recent home hardening efforts as part of California’s community wildfire preparedness strategy. The California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP), a joint powers authority between the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), was established to lead a pilot initiative that funds home hardening retrofits and defensible space efforts that increase the survivability of homes and communities during a wildfire.

The first properties in Kelseyville Riviera have been retrofitted as hardened homes in Lake County. The accomplishment was recognized with a media event and community tour. Home hardening retrofitting has never been done at a community scale like this before; typically, it has been done by individual homeowners, not entire communities.

Examples of home hardening efforts include installing ember-resistant vents and gutter covers and installing non-combustible siding.

“The combination of home hardening and defensible space significantly increase a homes chance of surviving a wildfire,” said State Fire Marshal Daniel Berlant, and chair of the California Wildfire Mitigation Program. “Today’s milestone is an important step in not only protecting the residents of Kelseyville Riviera, but it creates a model for hardened communities that others can learn from and replicate.”

The intent of this pilot program is to create a template from which communities can learn how to scale up from home hardening retrofitting a few individual homes to retrofitting the entire community, creating greater resilience for everyone.

"We are very proud to be a partner in this ground-breaking pilot project that will enhance the safety of not just the homes retrofitted, but also the safety of the entire community. Home hardening is a project that takes our knowledge of how to improve the survivability of homes during a wildland fire and applies that to a community in a high-risk area. A hardened home is one that resists the impacts of a fire, thus reducing the chances of a devastating conflagration fire, which travels from home-to-home," said CAL FIRE Chief Paul Duncan.

Currently, the pilot initiative is receiving bids and completing site walks for other homes in that same area and anticipate having up to 10 homes retrofitted by the end of September. The pilot home hardening retrofitting initiative provides funding for defensible space and ignition resistant retrofits to harden upwards of 2,500 homes in six counties over the next three years.

“Cal OES is pleased to partner with CAL FIRE on this pioneering pilot program, working to safeguard California communities from wildfire,” said Nancy Ward, Director of Cal OES. “The efforts the California Wildfire Mitigation Program have put forward will help us create community resiliency on a much larger scale in the years to come.”

The California Wildfire Mitigation Program (CWMP) was established through the passage of Assembly Bill 38 in 2019. The legislation directed CAL FIRE and Cal OES to enter into a joint powers agreement to administer a program to encourage cost-effective structure home hardening retrofitting, and fuel modification activities that create optimal defensible space. The pilot initiative will focus on socially vulnerable communities and provide financial assistance for low- and moderate-income households to complete the process and create defensible space. The purpose is to aid communities that have been identified as vulnerable to wildfire, including impacts by future climate risk, and have populations that have a greater risk of wildfire.

“These projects are just the starting point when it comes to keeping California communities safe from wildfire.” said J. Lopez, CWMP Executive Director. “We hope this will be the first of many CWMP projects providing the missing link in our approach to wildfire damage prevention and move from protecting individual homes to entire neighborhoods.”

Projects developed for these communities will leverage federal funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program with matching state dollars allocated by California’s Wildfire & Forest Resilience Budget Package. In August, FEMA awarded the first three pilot communities in Lake, Shasta, and San Diego counties, funding to begin home hardening retrofitting following the completion of all necessary environmental reviews. The second round of pilots were recently awarded funds to begin the first phase of program development in El Dorado and Tuolumne counties. Siskiyou County was added as the 6th pilot with a defensible space only pilot using state funds.

EVENT PHOTOS: [CAL FIRE Flickr](#)

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