

NEW BUILDING CODES GO INTO EFFECT JULY 1

By Lori Weisberg
STAFF WRITER

New statewide building code regulations designed to make homes in fire-prone areas safer will go into effect July 1 for cities and urbanized communities.

In general, this new section of the code requires buildings in the very high fire hazard severity zones to be constructed to ignition-resistant standards.

The code applies to new construction, but depending on the jurisdiction, the new regulations may also apply to remodeling projects.

Among the building components covered are:

• **Roofing:** As in the past, you still need to use Class A roofs.

• **Attic vents:** There is no change. Still required is a quarter-inch wire mesh covering for attic vents.

• **Eave vents:** They are prohibited, unless the vents can be designed to prevent the intrusion of flames and

embers. However, no performance test yet exists to evaluate the effectiveness of such vents. CalFire is working with laboratories to get them to suggest a test for these.

• **Exterior walls:** They must be noncombustible or of an "ignition-resistant material," such as fire-retardant-treated wood, that has passed a new performance test. Stucco is considered noncombustible. There are 15 wood siding and other products that already comply and are published in a handbook put out by the state Fire Marshal's Office.

• **Windows:** They have to be dual-paned, and one pane needs to be of tempered glass.

• **Exterior doors:** They need to be either solid wood or noncombustible, with any glass being standard "safety glass." Additional alternatives include doors meeting the performance requirements of the wildfire exposure test for walls, although no manufacturer has applied for this

as of now. If additional protection is desired, a standard commercial fire door with a "20-minute" rating (in a test, it resists flames for 20 minutes) can be used.

• **Decking:** The planks have to be made of ignition-resistant materials, and that's determined by testing, which means you can use composite decking material, as well as wood planks. The local government has the ultimate say on whether a product is permitted. The material can be heavy timber, exterior fire-treated wood and approved noncombustible materials like Trex that have passed the testing requirements. The code is silent on the under-structure of the deck.



Online: For more information on construction materials, go online to uniontrib.com/more/firebuild.

To learn more about defensible space guidelines, go to uniontrib.com/more/firespace2.