Response to Grand Jury Report: Wildfires Hit Home

Fire Chief Eric McCoy

Purpose of the Report

- The Grand Jury convened to address increasing challenges for homeowners living in the fire hazard severity zones.
- Goal to:
    - Identify shared responsibilities of local governments, fire service agencies, communities, and homeowners to reduce wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface.
    - Investigate actions taken by the California legislature and Department of Insurance to provide relief to policy holders.
    - Inform communities and homeowners about home hardening, defensible space, insurance risk reduction and wildfire safety awareness.

PC833.05 Response

- For Each **Finding**:
  - Must state Agree or Disagree (wholly or partially)
  - If disagreeing, must specify which part and explain the reasons

PC833.05 Response

- For Each **Recommendation**:
  - Must choose one of the following:
    - Implemented (include a summary of actions taken)
    - Will be implemented (provide a timeline)
    - Requires further analysis (explain scope and provide timeline)

Background & Context

How Huntington Beach became home to a Fire Hazard Severity Zone

In 2025, updated Local Responsibility Area maps designated the City's first **High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (HFHSZ)**. The City adopted the CalFire maps by **Ordinance No. 4336** following a robust public engagement process, then launched a defensible-space inspection program under Civil Code 1102.19.

Lower hazard than our neighbors. With a relatively small HFHSZ and no Very High zones, Huntington Beach homeowners face significantly less hazard than Orange County cities that contain VHFHSZs.

217
Parcels in the new HFHSZ
Mostly single-family homes

2025
First HFHSZ designated
Via updated LRA maps

No. 4336
Ordinance adopting CalFire maps
After public engagement

1102.19
Civil Code inspection basis
Defensible-space program

Findings and Responses

Grand Jury Findings • F1–F3

The City Council response to all six findings is AGREE

F1

Wildfires are driving up insurance costs

Premium increases, non-renewals, and inability to obtain coverage are escalating in the wildland-urban interface.

AGREE

City response: Brightwater HOA — the largest part of the HFHSZ — reports no owners currently facing increased premiums.

F2

Home ignition zone actions prevent disaster

Reducing ignition potential in the home ignition zone can prevent a wildland-urban interface conflagration.

AGREE

City response: HBFD enforces the Brightwater Fuel Modification Plan and shares wildland safety info city-wide.

F3

Community engagement increases effectiveness

Outreach on home hardening and defensible space improves both wildfire and insurance-risk mitigation.

AGREE

City response: Educational materials are online; outreach is expanding through events, fairs, and HOA gatherings.

Grand Jury Findings • F4–F6

Mitigation designations, insurer discounts, and state grant funding

F4

Mitigation designations reduce risk & premiums

Firewise USA, Fire Risk Reduction Community, and IBHS certifications lower wildfire risk and can lower premiums.

AGREE

City response: The Brightwater Fuel Modification Plan already requires community defensible space; HBFD will keep promoting designations.

F5

Safer from Wildfire requires insurer discounts

Insurers must offer discounts for home-hardening and defensible-space measures — regardless of hazard zone.

AGREE

City response: Already shared with the Brightwater HOA; HBFD will promote these regulations to the broader community.

F6

AB 888 grant funding aids resilience

The California Safe Homes Grant Program funds home-hardening and defensible-space work for eligible owners.

AGREE

City response: HBFD will share grant information via print, social media, OC wildfire fairs, and HOA presentations.

Recommendations • R2 & R4

Both recommendations: WILL BE IMPLEMENTED by December 31, 2026

R2

Countywide Wildfire Prevention Fair

Commit to participating in the annual wildfire prevention fair planned by the OC Board of Supervisors to showcase prevention outreach.

WILL BE IMPLEMENTED

- HBFD, is prepared to participate in the near future.
- Residents — especially those in the HFHSZ — will be encouraged to attend.

R4

Resident Outreach & Direct Contact

Distribute information, develop local outreach programs, and establish a direct point of contact for residents.

WILL BE IMPLEMENTED

- Launched a Wildland Fire Hazard Severity Zone webpage.
- Direct contact maintained with the Brightwater HOA.
- Community Risk Reduction Division leads and is expanding outreach.

Actions Underway

HFHSZ Webpage
Defensible-space and home-hardening guidance, building requirements, and inspection requests.

Inspection Program
Defensible-space inspections documenting findings under Civil Code 1102.19.

Direct Engagement
Ongoing contact with the Brightwater HOA and residents near open-space fuels.

Expanding Reach
From Brightwater to every home, condo, and apartment community in the HFHSZ.

Our commitment. HBFD will continue to ensure residents have the knowledge and resources to reduce fire risk — and to maintain robust wildfire prevention that helps combat the rising cost of insurance.

Recommended Action

Staff Recommendations

- Approve transmittal letter with formal response
- Authorize the Mayor to sign and submit the response to the Presiding Superior Court Judge
- Direct staff to ensure continued compliance with Grand Jury recommendations

Alternative Action

- Do not approve the formal response, and direct staff accordingly.

Questions?