

Central Calaveras Fire & Rescue Protection District

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Jeff Stone
Fire Chief



State Responsibility Area Fire Prevention Fee Information Release

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The State of California has imposed a \$150.00 fee for wildland fire prevention services. Central Calaveras Fire and Rescue is not responsible for this fee and does not receive any revenue from this fee. Attached is an article outlining the basic information about the fee and what it means to our District residents. If there are any other questions or comments regarding this SRA fee and the impact on local residents, Central Calaveras Fire encourages you to contact one of your local representatives listed below.

Contacts:

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This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / -- Root

California starts sending out fire protection bills

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Starting today, rural homeowners will begin receiving bills of up to \$150 to cover the wildlands fire prevention services offered by the state in their neighborhoods.

This controversial fee has faced constant opposition from the beginning. In justifying the fee, state fire officials point to the increase in the number of homes in rural areas, which they say drives up the cost of fighting fires in those areas.

Fire officials contend the fee is a byproduct of living in a wildland area that is more susceptible to wildfires, which are often a result of natural causes such as lightning strikes. The affected areas are known as state responsibility areas, or SRAs, and span 31 million acres in California.

The State Board of Equalization has identified 825,488 fee payers statewide, including 51,897 in El Dorado County; 57,549 in Placer County; 1,199 in Sacramento County; and 644 in Yolo County. The bills will be mailed alphabetically by county name, starting with Alameda County.

Enacted in July 2011, the fee is applied at a rate of \$150 per habitable structure, which the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is defining as "a building that can be occupied for residential use."

People who owned the properties on July 1, 2011, are responsible for paying the fee, regardless of whether they still live there.

Homeowners who already pay for fire protection from their local fire district will receive a \$35 reduction, bringing the fee to \$115 per habitable structure. State fire officials estimate that 95 percent qualify for the reduction.

"Fire protection in California is a very complicated but integrated system," said Daniel Berlant, spokesman for Cal Fire. "The state is responsible for helping with wildfires even where there is a local fire district."

Berlant said wildfires are one of the state's most costly natural disasters. They cost the state \$130 million in the last fiscal year.

In an attempt to lower this cost, which went as high as \$500 million in 2008, Cal Fire said money collected from the fee will be used to "fund a variety of important fire-prevention services within the SRA including brush clearance and activities to improve forest health so the forest can better withstand wildfire."

Cal Fire has a website, firepreventionfee.org, where homeowners can check an address to see if it is within SRA boundaries.

Critics say the fee was illegally enacted because it is a tax. As such, according to the state constitution, it should have received a two-thirds vote in both the Assembly and Senate – rather than a majority to pass.

"The people who are paying this fee have no direct benefit," said George Runner, member of the Board of Equalization.

"There are no new services that are going to exist because of this."

Runner has started his own website, calfirefee.com, to provide fee payers with "the latest news about California's illegal tax," as the site's headline reads.

The site provides visitors with information on how to appeal the fee and encourages them to speak out by contacting state officials, including Gov. Jerry Brown.

Despite his opposition to the fee, however, Runner said that everyone who receives a bill should pay it immediately.

"We're advising that you go ahead and pay the bill properly, otherwise you're going to get hit with penalties and interest," Runner said. "The bill needs to be paid, protested, and denied before moving forward to a lawsuit."

Runner said the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association is getting ready to work with fee payers in the first few counties to receive bills.

"Homeowners aren't the ones that start the fires. They're actually the best defense against fires out in (rural) areas and yet we're holding them responsible," he said. "This whole thing is no different to me than us deciding that we're going to do a crime-prevention fee in an area that has high crime."

Homeowners can visit firepreventionfee.org to view a sample bill and obtain a petition for redetermination.

A partial mailing schedule for this first round of bills can be found on the Board of Equalization website.

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Call The Bee's Ravali Reddy, (916) 326-5550.

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