

Study: Wildfire risk to homes will double in 40 years

Publisher's note: Getting rid of shake roofs is one way to protect homes. Lake Valley and Meeks Bay fire departments have grant funds to help homeowners put on a new roof. South Lake Tahoe Fire Department was asked to help write the grant and then get some of the money, but didn't do so according to Fire Chief Brian Uhler," ... because we don't have a dedicated bureau for fire prevention – a limitation relative to requirements to be eligible for applying for the grant."

By Merced Sun-Star

Climate change, population growth in rural areas and other factors could double the risk wildfires pose to homes within the next 40 years, according to a UC Merced study.

The information is part of a report by UC Merced Professor Anthony Westerling, prepared for the California Energy Commission.

In the paper, released Wednesday, Westerling and co-author Ben Bryant looked at the impacts of climate change, the state's projected population growth, urban and rural development, and land-use decisions on wildfires around the state in the coming century.

"Climate change is going to alter wildfire in our state," Westerling said, in a press release from UC Merced. "How and where we build our homes, and how we manage the landscape around them, will shape our vulnerability to wildfire."

Although policies to deal with climate change could help, Westerling said some level of additional warming is going to occur regardless.

As a result, smart-growth strategies for land use, such as concentrating growth in existing urban areas, educating people about implementing fire-proofing practices, such as creating defensible space around their homes, will help lessen the threat.

Fire-resistant home construction would help, especially in areas likely to be particularly threatened as the climate gets warmer.

“Fire suppression, fuels management and development policies, such as zoning and building codes, are the primary means we have to manage wildfire risks,” he said.

In addition, more people are building homes in forested areas. More developed rural land means a greater the chance for wildfires, the data shows, which increases the threat to the homes.

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