

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5198

As of February 22, 2017

Title: An act relating to fire suppression methodologies.

Brief Description: Concerning fire suppression methodologies.

Sponsors: Senators Becker, Warnick, Fain, Bailey and Brown.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/24/17, 2/14/17 [DP-WM, DNP].
Ways & Means: 2/21/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Natural Resources to report on the types and efficacy of fire retardants used and make recommendations to the Legislature by December 31, 2017.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.
Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Hawkins, Vice Chair; Fortunato.

Minority Report: Do not pass.
Signed by Senators Van De Wege, Ranking Minority Member; McCoy.

Staff: Kelsey Morfitt (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Jed Herman (786-7346)

Background: Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Legislature designated DNR as the state's manager for forest fire prevention and suppression activities. In this role, DNR must lead and supervise all matters pertaining to the state's forest fire service.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fire Retardants. Aerial and ground-applied fire retardants reduce wildfire intensity and rate of spread. Fire retardants include water, chemical sprays, water-enhancing gels, and foams. Fire retardants can pose a risk to human health, wildlife and habitats. Generally, the public is excluded from wildfire areas and not directly affected by fire retardants.

Summary of Bill: DNR must report on the types and risks of fire retardants used, including long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels. Specifically, this report must include best practices for fire retardants used at the national level. Additionally, the report must summarize public outreach and education regarding these fire suppressants.

Furthermore, DNR must recommend any legislative actions necessary to improve the protection of structures from wildfires. DNR has until December 31, 2017, to provide this report and recommendations to the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Natural Resources & Parks): PRO: This bill helps the public protect their homes from wildfires by applying a fire retardant foam to their home while waiting for a fire fighter response.

OTHER: This bill is achievable, but it would take a lot of staff work; especially best practices of retardants and structure protection.

Persons Testifying (Natural Resources & Parks): PRO: Senator Randi Becker, Prime Sponsor.

OTHER: Loren Torgerson, Dept. Natural Resources, Wildfire Policy Advisor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Natural Resources & Parks): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Information is needed from the DNR to help homeowners affected by wildfires, similar to what homeowners have in New Mexico.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Randi Becker, Prime Sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.