
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

ESSB 5198

Brief Description: Concerning fire suppression methodologies.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Becker, Warnick, Fain, Bailey and Brown).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

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

Hearing Date: 3/23/17

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has direct charge and responsibility over all matters relating to forest fire services in the state and acts as the state's manager for forest fire prevention and suppression activities.

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. Long-term fire retardants reduce or inhibit combustion, can remain effective for several days, and typically do not rely on the presence of water. Foams and gels are typically used with water.

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.

- Foams expand water, increase insulation, penetrate into the fuel layer, and remain on a fuel surface for several minutes.
- Gels increase the amount of water that reaches fuel, and can last for several hours.

Certain fire retardants can pose a risk to human health, wildlife, and habitats. Generally, the public is excluded from wildfire areas.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must report to the Legislature on several aspects related to the use of long-term fire retardants, foams, and gels for structure protection during wildfire. The report must include:

- a complete list of the types of fire retardants used by the DNR;
- an overview of criteria the DNR uses to determine when, where, and how to apply fire retardants, and a list of each instance in which the DNR has used such tools for fire suppression activities in the last three years;
- a description of public outreach and education the DNR has conducted relating to the use of foams or gels, if any;
- an analysis of national fire suppression best practices relating to the use of fire retardants and an examination of how to update DNR policies on the use of fire retardants to match national best practices; and
- an analysis of relevant material safety data sheets and impacts to human health and natural resources from long-term fire retardants, foams and gels.

The DNR must also provide recommendations for legislative action necessary to improve the protection of structures from wildfire. The report is subject to appropriation and due December 31, 2017.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.