

Backup battery bill advances in California

On May 31, a California bill that would require backup batteries with newly sold or installed residential garage door openers was passed by a 39-0 vote by the California State Senate. The measure now goes to the State Assembly. California State Sen. Bill Dodd, D-Napa, introduced the bill (SB 969) in January.

The initial draft of the bill has been amended with a new provision that would take effect on Jan. 1, 2019. If passed in its current status, the bill would also prohibit a replacement residential garage door from being connected to an existing garage door opener that does not have a battery backup.

Emerging from the fires

Dodd's bill responds to wildfires that struck parts of California in 2017, killing 44 people and destroying at least 8,400 homes and buildings. At least five of the deaths were reported to have some connection to automatic garage door openers that had no power.

Some elderly victims were reportedly unable to use the emergency disconnect and/or lift their garage doors manually. During one of the fires, Dodd himself faced this situation and needed help to open his "heavy wooden garage door." He also said that one of his neighbors drove through his garage door because he couldn't open it.

"We absolutely cannot allow something like this, that is so easily corrected, to happen again," said Sen. Dodd. "My bill requiring garage doors to have backup batteries will ensure no one is left vulnerable in the event of a future power failure during such a calamity."

Tracking the bill

On April 3, the bill passed the California Senate Transportation and Housing Committee on a 12-0 vote. On April 17, the bill passed the Senate Judiciary Committee on a 7-0 vote. On April 30, the bill passed the Senate Appropriations Committee on a 6-0 vote with one member not voting. At a hearing on May 25, the bill was recommended for passage and was then unanimously passed by the Senate on May 31.

The measure reportedly received some initial concerns that consumers would be penalized by the bill. However, after the Consumer Federation of California endorsed the legislation in February, legislators have unanimously supported it. If the bill encounters no difficulty in the Assembly, it could be passed and signed by the governor in July or August.

The bill's specifics

Specifically, the bill would:

- Prohibit a person, corporation, or entity from manufacturing, purchasing, selling, offering for sale, or installing in California a residential automatic garage door opener that does not have a battery backup that is designed to operate when activated by an electrical outage. (The bill also applies to commercial operators installed in a residence.)
- Require the battery backup to operate the opener without interruption during an electrical outage.
- Make a violation of these provisions subject to a civil penalty of \$1,000.



- On and after Jan. 1, 2019, prohibit a replacement residential garage door from being connected to an existing garage door opener that does not have a battery backup, regardless of the manufacture date of the opener.

Joe Hetzel, DASMA technical director, said that DASMA is continuing to monitor the bill. He prefers a public educational approach to the issue, focusing on the importance of proper operation and maintenance of the entire door system. ■



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