
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1200
Author: Caloza (D)
Amended: 5/23/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 15-0, 7/8/25

AYES: Padilla, Valladares, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle, Hurtado, Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber Pierson

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Emergency services: disaster preparedness

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill requires the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to biennially convene key personnel and agencies to participate in tabletop exercise, as specified, and requires OES, in cooperation with California Volunteers, to annually conduct community disaster preparedness training in vulnerable regions of the state, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law authorizes, pursuant to the California Emergency Services Act (ESA), the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency, and local officials and governments to proclaim a local emergency, when specified conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist.

This bill:

- 1) Requires OES to biennially convene key personnel and agencies that have emergency management roles and responsibilities to participate in tabletop exercise in which the participant's emergency preparedness plans are discussed and evaluated under various simulated catastrophic disaster situations.
- 2) Requires OES to invite governmental agencies, educational entities, military installations, private businesses, and nonprofit organizations that operate or own concerns in various sectors that provide fundamental services in the community that, when stabilized, enable all other aspects of society to function to participate in the tabletop exercises, as specified.
- 3) Requires the simulated catastrophic disaster situations to be based upon specified disaster response plans for incidents that could result in thousands of casualties, tens of thousands of evacuees, overwhelm state and local response capabilities, and severely disrupt lifeline infrastructure such as water, electricity, fuel, food, cellular communications, and transportation developed by OES and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- 4) Requires OES to design the exercise to enhance the capabilities of the participants, as specified.
- 5) Requires OES to report on each tabletop exercise it conducts pursuant to this bill to the committees on budget, the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management, and the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization by February 1, 2028, and biennially thereafter of the calendar year following each biennial simulation and evaluation, as specified.
- 6) Requires OES, to the greatest extent possible, to use federal preparedness grant funding to offset the state, local, and tribal government costs associated with participation in the tabletop exercises required by this bill.
- 7) Requires OES to annually, and in cooperation with California Volunteers, coordinate with local Community Emergency Response Team programs to conduct community disaster preparedness training in vulnerable regions of the state.
- 8) Requires the vulnerable regions for training pursuant to this bill to be identified based on data from FEMA's National Risk Index and a community vulnerability index, or similar risk assessment tools.

- 9) Requires OES and California Volunteers to ensure that the annual training conducted pursuant to this bill is coordinated with any established Community Emergency Response Team program serving the region in which the training takes place.
- 10) Requires a training event to emphasize actions to increase community resilience to disasters, utilize community green or open space for drills and preparedness activities whenever feasible, and promote inclusive engagement of community members, including individuals with disabilities and those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- 11) Requires a training event to include testing of community emergency notification systems in the area and requires OES to prioritize testing in communities that have experienced past challenges with emergency alerts or evacuation warnings, including those observed during recent wildfires in the state.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author's office, "as disasters grow more frequent and severe, California must regularly go beyond written plans and into practiced preparedness. AB 1200 requires the state to convene realistic, multi-agency tabletop disaster drills every two years. These exercises will simulate catastrophic emergencies and identify weaknesses in coordination, communication, and outreach- especially for our most vulnerable residents."

Further, "when emergencies hit, every minute counts and all responders play a critical role. Practicing our response in advance will save time, resources, and lives. AB 1200 is about making sure that when the next big emergency strikes, Californians are ready."

California's Complex Catastrophes. In written testimony provided to the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations in 2021, California's then-OES Director stated "the State of California arguably faces the most complex and severe disaster conditions in the nation and these challenges and complexities grow in magnitude each year. In the past decade, California has experienced every conceivable type of natural and manmade disaster including drought, earthquake, flood, catastrophic wildfire, mudslides, dam failure, cyber security attacks, oil

spills, natural gas leak, civil unrest, terrorism, and tsunamis. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has put our emergency management system to the test.”

A series of 14 destructive wildfires tore through the Los Angeles area of Southern California in January, 2025, placing an estimated 330,000 people on an evacuation advisory, with approximately 190,000 individuals facing mandatory evacuation. The fires damaged or destroyed over 18,000 structures and claimed the lives of 30 Californians. The Palisades fire and Eaton fire now rank among the deadliest and most destructive fires in California history. These fires ignited amid an extreme weather event, fueled by unusually severe fire weather conditions including Santa Ana winds of nearly 100 miles per hour across the State’s southern region, and following an extended period of drought in the area. These fires were, at least in part, a product of what UCLA and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources scientist Daniel Swain calls a sort of “hydroclimate whiplash.”

When flames erupted from Eaton Canyon on January 7, neighborhoods on Altadena’s east side got evacuation orders at 7:26 p.m., but residents on the west side did not receive orders until 3:25 a.m. – hours after fires began to blaze through their neighborhoods. All of the 17 individuals confirmed dead in the Eaton fire were on the town’s west side.

On January 9, residents across the Los Angeles metropolitan region of 10 million people received a wireless emergency alert urging them to prepare to evacuate. A correction was issued approximately 20 minutes later, stating the alert was sent “in ERROR.” However, a stream of faulty alerts continued to sound out the following day. Residents as far away as Long Beach, more than 35 miles from any active fire, reported receiving pings on their phones.

In 2018, the Camp fire engulfed the town of Paradise and killed 85 people, becoming the state’s deadliest wildfire. During the conflagration, fewer than a quarter of Paradise’s 27,000 residents received official evacuation order via phone. A 2020 after-action report found just one trained staffer was managing alerts during the first 16 hours of the fire (not uncommon in smaller and rural counties), the county struggled with its latest wireless emergency alert technology at the time, and did not sufficiently test its new system for a worst-case scenario.

The 2025 Los Angeles County Fires and Windstorm event came just two years after multiple atmospheric rivers during the 2022-23 winter resulted in floods that affected parts of Southern California, the California Central Coast, and Northern California. The flooding resulted in property damage and at least 22 fatalities. At

least 200,000 homes and businesses lost power during the December-January storms and 6,000 individuals were ordered to evacuate. The floods were widely reported by media as an example of how climate change is increasing extreme changes in weather, especially cycles of precipitation and drought. There are currently 59 open state of emergency proclamations in the state.

Emergency Preparedness and Response. OES is responsible for addressing natural, technological, or manmade disasters and emergencies, and preparing the State to prevent, respond to, quickly recover from, and mitigate the effects of both intentional and natural disasters. As part of their overall preparedness mission, OES is required to develop a State Emergency Plan (SEP), State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP), and maintains Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the Emergency Management Mutual Aid System (EMMA). OES, in coordination with FEMA and local partners, has developed four Catastrophic Plans to augment the State Emergency Plan.

State Emergency Plan. The SEP describes how response to natural or human-caused emergencies occurs in California. The plan is a requirement of the ESA, and describes methods for conducting emergency operations, the process for rendering mutual aid, emergency services of government agencies, how resources are mobilized, how the public is informed, and how continuity of government is maintained during emergency. The SEP further describes hazard mitigation, as well as preparedness and recovery from disasters. The SEP defines Emergency Support Functions (ESF), which are discipline-specific groups that develop functional annexes to set goals, objectives, operational concepts, capabilities, organization structures, and related policies and procedures. Under the SEP, there are 18 ESFs led by a state agency and represent an alliance of state government and other stakeholders with similar functional responsibilities.

FEMA Exercises. FEMA supports the nation's exercise activities through two programs administered by the National Exercise Division (NED). Exercises help build preparedness for threats and hazards by providing a low-risk, cost-effective environment to: test and validate plans, policies, procedures, and capabilities; and identify resource requirements, capability gaps, strengths, areas for improvement, and potential best practices. NED has collected and compiled lessons learned and best practices from across the whole community of exercise practitioners. The resulting guidance provides insights on successfully planning and conducting an exercise.

The National Exercise Program (NEP) consists of a four-year cycle of exercises across the nation that examine and validate capabilities in all preparedness mission areas, guided by strategic priorities set by the National Security Council's Principals Committee. NEP exercise partners and organizations complete a variety of activities throughout a NEP cycle. They lead exercise programs in accordance with their organization's statutory, regulatory, or policy authorities and at the direction of their senior leaders. They also design, deliver, and evaluate exercises at all levels of government and with the whole community as part of organizational day-to-day business.

The Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) provides a set of guidance that any organization can use to structure and effective exercise and evaluation program with a common approach to program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning.

FEMA's internet website provides exercise and preparedness tools through the Preparedness Toolkit (PrepToolkit). The PrepToolkit is an online collaborative environment in which individuals from all levels of government and the private and nonprofit sectors can prepare for risks in their communities and provides an avenue to execute preparedness activities efficiently and easily and to share this work with others. PrepToolkit provides emergency management professionals the tools to implement the National Preparedness System and embodies FEMA's mission: Helping People Before, During and After Disasters.

Biennial OES Tabletop Exercises. This bill requires OES to biennially convene key personnel and agencies that have emergency management roles and responsibilities to participate in tabletop exercises in which the participant's emergency preparedness plans are discussed and evaluated under various simulated catastrophic disaster situations. Tabletop exercises involve key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting, and can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures.

The purpose of a tabletop exercise is to facilitate a learning environment where response departments and agencies can come together, face-to-face, to understand and talk through an integrated response to a specific emergency situation. Tabletop exercises provide an environment for learning, discussing, and identifying issues that may not be as obvious when participants or players are physically separated as they are during drills and other exercises. Additionally, tabletop exercises provide an opportunity to compare what participants or players

actually expect to do and they plan to do it with what is written in an emergency plan, highlighting changes that may need to be made.

This bill requires OES to design the tabletop exercises to enhance the capabilities of the participants to do various things, including engage the communities that they each serve in the development of executable strategic, operational, or tactical-level approaches to meet defined disaster response objectives. Additionally, this bill requires OES to report on each tabletop exercise it conducts to the committees on budget, the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management, and the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization by February 1, 2028, and biennially thereafter. This bill requires OES to use federal preparedness grant funding to offset the state, local, and tribal government costs associated with participation in the tabletop exercises to the greatest extent possible.

Reports to the Legislature. State or local agencies required to file reports with the Legislature must submit a printed copy to the Secretary of the Senate, an electronic copy to the Chief Clerk of the Assembly, and an electronic or printed copy to the Office of Legislative Counsel. The Assembly and Senate each compile a list of reports received. The public may access and search agency reports by keywords, agency, authority type, recipient, or due date online at www.agencyreports.ca.gov.

An article in CalMatters from December of last year titled “most reports ordered by California’s Legislature this year are shown as missing,” noted that at the time, of the 867 reports due between January 1 and December 9 of 2024, “84% have not been filed to the Office of Legislative Counsel.” Further, of the “16% that were submitted – 138 reports – 68 were filed late. Another 344 reports are due by Dec. 31.” The article notes that the “data is in line with previous CalMatters reporting that found 70% of about 1,1000 reports due between February 2023 and February 2024 had not been filed to the Office of Legislative Counsel. About half of those that were filed were late.”

California Volunteers, Office of the Governor. Led by the state’s Chief Service Office, California Volunteers, Office of the Governor engages Californians in service, volunteering and civic action to tackle our State’s most pressing challenges while mobilizing all Californians to volunteer and serve in the communities. #CaliforniansForAll was launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to build on the efforts of California Volunteers to establish a statewide volunteer corps to help with the state’s response to emergencies and disasters. California Volunteers also administers the AmeriCorps programs in California with over 80 programs providing critical services to more than 160,000 annually.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that professional responders can rely on during disaster situations, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks.

This bill requires OES, in cooperation with California Volunteers, to coordinate with local CERT programs to conduct community disaster preparedness training in vulnerable regions of the state to, among other things, increase community resilience to disaster. Additionally this bill requires those regions to be identified based on data from specified sources and requires a training event to include testing of community notification systems in the area and requires OES to prioritize testing in communities that have experienced past challenges with emergency alerts or evacuation warnings, including those observed during recent wildfires in the state.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1071 (Rodriguez) of 2021 would have required OES to biennially convene key personnel and agencies that have emergency management roles and responsibilities to participate in tabletop exercises to evaluate responses to various simulated disaster situations. (Held on the Senate Appropriations Committee Suspense File)

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, OES reports total costs of approximately \$3.57 million in the first year and \$2.82 million annually ongoing for 11 new positions in OES's California Specialized Training Institute and Community Emergency Response Team (General Fund). Other costs include ongoing travel expenses, technology licenses, and training materials, as well as for workload associated with curriculum development.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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