

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1749 (Dixon)
As Amended March 19, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Prohibits the use of a drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with wildfire suppression efforts or related emergency response efforts, and authorizes the Attorney General, a county counsel, or a city attorney to bring civil actions, as specified, for each violation

Major Provisions

- 1) Prohibits the operation or use of an unmanned aerial vehicle, remote piloted aircraft, or drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with a wildfire suppression, or law enforcement or emergency response efforts related to a wildfire suppression.
- 2) Authorizes the Attorney General or a county counsel or a city attorney to bring civil actions to enforce the above prohibition and authorizes the following for each violation:
 - a) A civil penalty of up to \$75,000
 - b) Injunctive Relief
 - c) Reasonable attorney's fees and costs

COMMENTS

Background: Firefighting aircraft play a crucial role in wildfire suppression by delivering water and fire retardant, as well as transporting personnel. Firefighting aircraft operate at very low altitudes—often just a few hundred feet above the ground—the same airspace where drones are typically flown. This creates a significant risk of midair collisions or pilot distractions that could lead to serious or fatal accidents. When unauthorized drones enter wildfire airspace, fire agencies often have to ground the firefighting aircraft to prevent midair collisions.

Suspending air operations can reduce the effectiveness of suppression efforts, allowing wildfires to grow larger and move into untreated terrain, thus endangering both firefighters and the public. Additionally, if a drone loses its communication link, it could crash and injure firefighters or civilians below.

To increase public awareness of these dangers, the U.S. Forest Service and USDA launched the "If You Fly, We Can't" campaign, emphasizing the importance of keeping drones away from wildfire areas.

Documented Cases: According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), more than 100 documented cases of unauthorized drones interfering with wildfire response nationwide in recent years. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2019, at least 20 documented instances of unauthorized drone flights in seven states—including at least 3 in California—resulted in the shutdown of aerial firefighting operations on nine occasions. More recently, during the 2025 Palisades Fire, a drone crashed into a Super Scooper aircraft, a firefighting aircraft that can carry and drop up to 1,500 gallons of water at a time. The drone

damaged the Super Scooper's left wing, causing a hole and requiring the plane to be grounded for several days. This aircraft also held two firefighters, placing their safety at risk, as well as the safety of anyone on the ground below if the pilot could not land the plane.

Temporary Flight Restrictions: The FAA frequently establishes Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) around wildfires to protect firefighting aircraft. All unauthorized aircraft, including drones, are prohibited from entering these restricted areas unless operated by a firefighting agency. However, even when a TFR is not in place, interfering with wildfire suppression is still a federal crime.

Federal Penalties: Federal law imposes strict penalties on individuals who interfere with wildfire suppression efforts. Violators can face up to 12 months in prison for disrupting firefighting operations on public lands. Additionally, Congress has authorized the FAA to impose civil fines of up to \$75,000 against drone operators who conduct unsafe or unauthorized operations. This may include any interference with wildfire suppression, law enforcement, or emergency response operations.

According to the Author

"AB 1749 is a necessary tool for our emergency services when unauthorized drones impede on wildfire suppression. According to the U.S. Forest Service, there were nine public drone incursions that resulted in the grounding of aerial firefighting efforts. Recently with the Palisades Fire in Los Angeles, a drone crashed into a firefighting Super Scooper plane, leaving a hole in the wing and grounding the aircraft for several days. Not only are the repairs to the specialized equipment costly, but an aircraft or multiple aircrafts being grounded for an unspecified amount of time can be life threatening."

Arguments in Support

According to the California Professional Firefighters, "AB 1749 will impose civil liability onto individuals who operate a drone in an emergency area and impede emergency response while providing an exemption for necessary, licensed operation, ensuring that firefighters are able to carry out their lifesaving, dangerous work without the inhibition of civilian unmanned aircraft interference."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) Likely minor costs to the AG. The Department of Justice reports no significant impact from this bill, indicating the AG is unlikely to pursue related enforcement actions.
- 2) Ongoing cost pressures of an unknown amount, potentially up to \$150,000, to the courts in additional workload by authorizing a new civil action to enforce the drone interference prohibition that may be filed by the AG, county counsel, or city attorney (General Fund (GF) or Trial Court Trust Fund). It is unclear how many civil actions may be filed statewide and how much court time may be needed to resolve each case, but it generally costs approximately \$1,000 to operate a courtroom for one hour. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased pressure on staff and the TCTF may create a demand for

increased court funding from the GF. The state budget provides annual GF backfills to the TCTF to offset revenue reductions, totaling approximately \$117.3 million in fiscal year 2025-26.

VOTES

ASM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: 6-0-1

YES: Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bennett, DeMaio, Ransom

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains

ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0

YES: Kalra, Macedo, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Dixon, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Sanchez, Stefani, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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