
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1749 (Dixon) - Interfering with wildfire suppression and emergency responses with drone

Version: June 17, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: E.M. 9 - 0, JUD. 13 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Janelle Miyashiro

Bill Summary: AB 1749 prohibits a person from operating or using an unmanned aerial vehicle, remote piloted aircraft, or drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with wildfire suppression efforts or incidents involving a temporary flight restriction (TFR) issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and authorizes related civil enforcement action, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown, potentially significant workload cost pressures to the state funded trial court system to adjudicate any civil actions filed as a result of this bill (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund). The fiscal impact of this bill to the courts will depend on many unknowns, including the number of cases filed and the factors unique to each case. An eight-hour court day costs approximately \$8,000 in staff in workload. If court days exceed 10, costs to the trial courts could reach hundreds of thousands of dollars. While the courts are not funded on a workload basis, an increase in workload could result in delayed court services and would put pressure on the General Fund to fund additional staff and resources and to increase the amount appropriated to backfill for trial court operations.
- Unknown, potentially minor costs to the Attorney General (AG). The Department of Justice (DOJ) does not anticipate a significant fiscal impact, indicating that the AG may choose not to pursue enforcement actions under this bill.

Background: In recent years, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) has warned the public about the incursion of drones and other unmanned aerial systems into firefighting airspace. These incursions raise serious concern as they force the temporary suspension of critical aerial firefighting operations, as required by TFRs issued by the FAA. The FAA regularly implements TFRs around wildfire areas to protect the safety of aircraft participating in firefighting operations. All aircraft, including drones, are explicitly prohibited from entering these restricted areas unless they are operated by an agency directly involved in wildfire suppression efforts. Even when a TFR is not in effect, drone pilots are strongly urged to avoid flying near wildfires as it is a crime to interfere with the air attack operations.

When drones are detected within firefighting airspace, fire response agencies must ground their aircraft to mitigate the risk of a midair collision. Aircraft not only drop water and fire retardant, but also serve as lookouts to support firefighters on the ground. This delay in airborne response can allow fires to continue spreading and poses a significant threat to the safety of firefighters on the ground, residents, and properties in nearby communities. Aircraft do not resume flying until the airspace is deemed clear.

According to CAL FIRE, the U.S. Forest Service reported more than 200 drone sightings over active wildfires in 2025. More than half of these incidents occurred during the Eaton and Palisades fires in Southern California. In one case, a drone struck a Canadian “Super Scooper,” punching a hole in the aircraft’s wing and grounding it for several days for repairs.

Proposed Law:

- Prohibits a person from operating or using an unmanned aerial vehicle, remote piloted aircraft, or drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with either of the following:
 - A wildfire suppression, or law enforcement or emergency response efforts related to a wildfire suppression.
 - An emergency response related to an incident for which a TFR has been issued by the FAA.
- Allows the AG, county counsel, or city attorney to bring a civil action to enforce the above prohibition and authorizes the following for each violation:
 - A civil penalty not exceeding \$75,000 for each violation
 - Injunctive relief.
 - Reasonable attorney’s fees and costs.

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