

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1749 (Dixon)

As Amended June 17, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

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

Senate Amendments

Additionally prohibits operating or using an unmanned aerial vehicle, remote-piloted aircraft, or drone to knowingly or recklessly interfere with an emergency response related to an incident for which a temporary flight restriction has been issued by the Federal Aviation Administration.

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 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (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 USDA, in 2019, at least 20 documented instances of unauthorized drone flights in seven states—including at least three 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

According to TechNet Southwest, "We respectfully request amendments to ensure the bill does not inadvertently restrict legitimate, federally authorized drone operations that provide significant public and economic benefits. Specifically, we recommend including a clear exemption for drones operating pursuant to authorization by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), including those engaged in commercial activities under established federal frameworks. As currently drafted, the bill could create ambiguity for operators who are compliant with FAA regulations and operating under lawful authority, including those supporting critical services."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0-3

YES: 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, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Jackson, Lee, Celeste Rodriguez

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Reyes

UPDATED

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