

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON UTILITIES AND ENERGY

Cottie Petrie-Norris, Chair

AB 1873 (Bennett) – As Amended March 26, 2026

SUBJECT: County of Ventura: fire suppression: backup energy source

SUMMARY: Amends existing requirements for Ventura County water suppliers to extend the time for mobile or mutual aid backup energy sources to come online from 60 to 90 minutes after a loss of power, requires water suppliers to notify the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (VCOES) if that backup power is not available within 90 minutes, sets a July 1, 2027, deadline for emergency preparedness plans, adds a new assessment item to existing post-fire reporting requirements, and makes other clarifying changes. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Extends the time for mobile or mutual aid backup energy sources to come online from 60 to 90 minutes after a loss of power, or as soon as practically possible after deenergization. Requires the water supplier to notify VCOES no later than 72 hours after a loss of power if the backup energy source does not provide power within 90 minutes.
- 2) Sets a July 1, 2027, deadline for a water supplier to establish an emergency preparedness plan in coordination with VCOES and the Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) for response to red flag warnings, extreme weather events, and other major power outages or emergencies that pose a potential threat to providing water service.
- 3) Amends existing law requiring VCFD, in cooperation with the affected water supplier, to prepare a report for the Ventura County Board of Supervisors when a fire damages and makes uninhabitable more than 10 residential dwellings within a water supplier's service area, to additionally require the report to assess whether a water supplier using mobile or mutual aid backup energy sources made the required notification to VCOES due to a loss of power, and the amount of time critical infrastructure experienced a loss of power.
- 4) Declares that a special statute is necessary, as specified.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires, commencing July 1, 2030, a Ventura County water supplier, as specified, to have access to sufficient backup energy sources to operate critical fire suppression infrastructure needed to supply water for at least 24 hours for fire suppression in high or very high fire hazard severity zones (HFHSZ or VHFHSZ) in Ventura County, as specified, or have access to alternative sources of water supplied by a different water supplier or agency, as specified. (Water Code § 7080)
- 2) Authorizes a Ventura County water supplier, in order to meet the above requirements, to use mobile backup energy sources or procure an energy source via an established mutual aid agreement provided the backup energy source can provide power within 12 hours of the National Weather Service alerting the region of a red flag warning and provide power

for at least 24 hours after a loss of power and within 60 minutes of a loss of power.
(Water Code § 7080)

- 3) Requires a water supplier to establish an emergency preparedness plan in coordination with the VCOES and the VCFD for response to major power outages or emergencies that pose a potential threat to providing water service, and to initiate action under that plan upon issuance of a red flag warning for Ventura County. (Water Code § 7080)
- 4) Requires VCFD, in cooperation with the affected water supplier, to prepare a report for the Ventura County Board of Supervisors when a fire damages and makes uninhabitable more than 10 residential dwellings within a water supplier's service area. Requires the report to assess whether water tanks were filled at an appropriate level for fire suppression, whether disruption of water delivery due to a lack of electricity was timely and appropriately mitigated, and whether critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources met applicable fire safety standards. (Water Code § 7080)
- 5) Requires the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to identify backup power systems needed for telecommunications facilities not on customers' premises and authorizes the CPUC to set performance reliability standards for telecommunications backup power, subject to best practices and feasibility. (Public Utilities Code § 2892.1 (b-e))
- 6) Requires the State Fire Marshall to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on consistent statewide criteria and the severity of fire hazard expected to prevail in those areas. (Government Code § 51178)
- 7) Authorizes the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency, and local officials and local governments to proclaim a local emergency, when conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist, and authorizes the exercise of certain powers in response to that emergency. (Government Code § 8558)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal and will be referred to the Committee on Appropriations for its review.

BACKGROUND:

In 2025, the Legislature enacted AB 367 (Bennett, Chapter 690), which established Chapter 7 of the Water Code (commencing with Section 7080) to require Ventura County water suppliers to maintain backup energy sources for critical fire suppression infrastructure in high and very high fire hazard severity zones. The legislation was prompted by the history of devastating fires in Ventura County and was designed to aid in the continued delivery of water for fire suppression during power outages and other emergencies. Additional background information on the underlying policy can be found in the Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee's prior analysis of AB 367.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Author's Statement.* According to the author, "Ventura County has experienced its three most destructive fires in the last 8 years – Thomas (2017), Woolsey (2018), and Mountain (2024). Last year, I authored AB 367 to ensure that Ventura County would be able to use its resources to their maximum effectiveness. As that bill moved through the process, I committed to working with cities in my district to address potential implementation concerns. This bill, AB 1873, reflects the collaborative discussion we had with our local water suppliers about their implementation issues. It makes sensible changes that preserve the integrity of last year's bill while creating more efficient paths towards effective implementation."
- 2) *Purpose of the Bill.* This bill makes clarifying changes to Water Code Chapter 7, enacted by AB 367 (Bennett, 2025), to address implementation concerns raised by local water suppliers and local governments in Ventura County. Specifically, the bill extends the time for mobile and mutual aid backup energy sources to come online from 60 to 90 minutes, establishes a clear deadline for emergency preparedness plans, and strengthens post-fire reporting requirements to improve accountability.

- 3) *Related Legislation.*

AB 2013 (Bennett, 2026) would require a water supplier that services more than 100 customers that are located in a moderate, high, or very high fire hazard severity zone, as specified, to establish an emergency preparedness plan for response to red flag warnings, extreme weather events, and other major power outages or emergencies that pose a potential threat to providing adequate water service. Status: Set for hearing in Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials on April 14, 2026.

- 4) *Prior Legislation.*

AB 367 (Bennett) requires Ventura County water suppliers to: have backup power, or access to alternative water sources, capable of supplying water for at least 24 hours for fire suppression in high or very high fire hazard severity zones; annually inspect critical fire suppression infrastructure and backup energy sources and notify significant water delivery reductions, as specified, to the VCOES. Also requires the VCFD, in cooperation with the water supplier, to issue a report, as specified, after significant fire damage within a service area, as specified. Status: Chapter 690, Statutes of 2025.

AB 372 (Bennett) would, contingent on funding being appropriated pursuant to a bond act, establish the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program within the California Office of Emergency Services for the distribution of state matching funds to communities within the Wildland Urban Interface in designated high fire severity zones or very high fire hazard severity zones to improve water system infrastructure. Status: Inactive File – Senate.

SB 341 (McGuire) requires the CPUC to adopt and implement backup power rules for telecommunications service providers to ensure service continuity during power outages, especially in high fire threat areas. Status: Chapter 425, Statutes of 2021.

AB 2421 (Quirk) requires local agencies to expedite permitting for emergency standby generators at macro cell tower sites. This measure was intended to enhance the resiliency of wireless networks during power outages, particularly in high fire threat areas. Status: Chapter 225, Statutes of 2020.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Professional Firefighters
City of Thousand Oaks

Opposition

None on file.

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