

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 591 (Caloza) – As Introduced February 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Emergency services: mutual aid: public works

SUMMARY: Requires the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in consultation with relevant local and state public works agencies, to develop and adopt a Public Works Emergency Mutual Aid Plan to ensure the systematic and efficient mobilization of public works resources during emergencies. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in consultation with relevant local and state public works agencies, to develop and adopt a Public Works Emergency Mutual Aid Plan to ensure the systematic and efficient mobilization of public works resources during emergencies.
- 2) Provides that it is the purpose of the Legislature to facilitate the rendering of public works resources critical for disaster response and recovery to areas stricken by an emergency as part of other mutual aid rendered in accordance with approved emergency plans.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the office of the Governor and makes Cal OES responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or manmade disasters and emergencies. (Gov. Code Section 8550)
- 2) Authorizes the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency and local officials and local governments to proclaim a local emergency, when specified conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist, and authorizes the Governor or the appropriate local government to exercise certain powers in response to that emergency. (Gov. Code Section 8558)
- 3) Defines "state of emergency" and "local emergency" to mean a duly proclaimed existence of conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state or territorial limits of a local government caused by, among other things, a sudden and severe energy shortage. (Gov. Code Section 8558)
- 4) Requires the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) for managing multiagency and multijurisdictional responses to emergencies in California. State agencies are required to use SEMS and local government entities must use SEMS in order to be eligible for any reimbursement of response-related costs under the state's disaster assistance programs. (Gov. Code Section 8607)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author, “AB 591 strengthens California’s disaster response system by ensuring public works resources such as personnel, equipment and materials are included in mutual aid efforts. Currently there is no coordinated approach to mobilize public works when disasters strike. As we recently witnessed during the Eaton and Palisades fires, having mutual aid agreements in place like we did for firefighters, saves lives and livelihoods. We need to expand the scope of our mutual aid agreements to include public works personnel who are essential workers during the disaster recovery period. AB 591 closes that gap.”

Equity impact: According to the author’s staff, “This legislation would affect low-income and disadvantaged communities, areas with limited public works resources. These areas already face bigger challenges, like damaged roads, limited crews, and limited access to clean water and power. This bill ensures that public works personnel, equipment, and materials can be shared more efficiently across cities and counties. By creating a statewide plan, it helps direct aid to the communities that need it most, making disaster recovery faster and fairer for everyone.”

2025 Los Angeles Fires: In January 2025, Los Angeles County experienced the second and third most destructive fires in California history: the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire. AccuWeather estimates these fires' total damage and economic loss to be between \$250 billion and \$275 billion. At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The blazes burned a combined 37,469 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

The Eaton Fire became the second most destructive fire in California history after destroying 9,418 buildings, 1,074 structures damaged, and 17 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire is the third most destructive fire in state history, with 6,837 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities.

As firefighters were battling the largest conflagrations, additional fires broke out in the Los Angeles area. Crews were able to stop the forward spread and contain the blazes. These fires included the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst, and Auto fires, which burned close to 2,400 acres between them. Two weeks after the initial fires, the Hughes Fire began near Castaic Lake in northern Los Angeles County on January 22 and grew to over 10,000 acres. Firefighters fully contained the fire on January 30 after covering 10,425 acres.

Probability of Strong and/or Major Earthquakes: The United States Geological Survey and other scientists estimate a 72-percent probability that at least one earthquake of Magnitude 6.7 or greater, capable of causing widespread damage, will strike the San Francisco Bay Area before 2044. For the Los Angeles region, the same model forecasts a 60-percent probability that an earthquake of Magnitude 6.7 or greater will occur before 2044.

Strong earthquakes of Magnitude 6 to 6.9 strike California, on average, once every two to three years. An earthquake of this size, such as the 1994 Northridge Earthquake (Magnitude 6.7) or the 1983 Coalinga Earthquake (Magnitude 6.7), is capable of causing significant damage if the

epicenter is near a densely populated area. Major earthquakes (Magnitude 7 to 7.9) occur in California about once every 10 years.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) modeling for major earthquake scenarios in the Bay Area and Southern California, violent shaking in densely populated areas could result in over 50,000 displaced households and over 30,000 individuals requiring short-term shelter.

Floods, storms and climate change: California is also susceptible to catastrophic flooding, winter storms, extreme heat and even hurricanes. The complexity, scope and scale of these risks underscore the need for strong, statewide mutual aid systems.

Public Works in Disasters: Public works resources such as public works personnel, equipment, and materials are necessary to support large-scale disasters of any kind in our State. Disasters are typically beyond the capabilities of most public works agencies. Local equipment may be damaged by the disaster, rendering it out of service. Following a disaster, local public works staff may be affected both emotionally and physically by the event, affecting their ability to safely perform work. Relying on neighboring communities as the only source of assistance is dangerous because they too can be impacted by the same disaster. Routine work such as water shut-offs, treatment plant operations, and sign installation will still need to be completed. As first responders, public works agencies are involved with the disaster from the onset to the end of the recovery phase. During a disaster, public works equipment and manpower will be limited.

Resources that could be available through a statewide Public Works Mutual Aid System include labor crews, debris loading equipment, aerial lift trucks, brush chippers, engineering and technical assistance, pumping and vac truck operations, vehicle maintenance, and operational and command staff.

Emergency Preparedness and Response: Cal 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, Cal OES is required to develop a State Emergency Plan (SEP) and State Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP); maintain the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the Emergency Management Mutual Aid System (EMMA); and assist counties with their local Emergency Operation Plans (EOP). Cal 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 California Emergency Services Act (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:

CA EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTIONS	LEAD STATE AGENCY
CA-ESF 1 Transportation	CA Transportation Agency
CA-ESF 2 Communication	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 3 Construction and Engineering	Government Operations Agency
CA-ESF 4 Fire and Rescue	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 5 Management	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 6 Care and Shelter	CA Health and Human Services Agency
CA-ESF 7 Resources	Government Operations Agency
CA-ESF 8 Public Health and Medical	CA Health and Human Services Agency
CA-ESF 9 Search and Rescue	Merged with ESF 13 Law and ESF 4 Fire.
CA-ESF 10 Hazardous Materials	CA Environmental Protection Agency
CA-ESF 11 Food and Agriculture	CA Department of Food and Agriculture
CA-ESF 12 Utilities	CA Natural Resources Agency
CA-ESF 13 Law Enforcement	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 14 Recovery	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 15 Public Information	Governor's Office of Emergency Services
CA-ESF 16 Evacuation	Merged with CA-ESF 13/Law Enforcement
CA-ESF 17 Volunteer/Donations Mgmt.	California Volunteers
CA-ESF 18 Cybersecurity	Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Catastrophic Plans: California's catastrophic plans establish the joint federal and state response to and recovery from catastrophic events. Four Catastrophic Plans exist: the Northern California Catastrophic Flood Response Plan, the Bay Area Earthquake Plan, the Cascadia Subduction Zone Earthquake and Tsunami Response Plan, and the Southern California Catastrophic Earthquake Response Plan. Cal OES trains and exercises for the scenarios outlined in these plans and works with FEMA to update them every five years, ensuring that state and federal agencies are aligned when disaster strikes.

Master Mutual Aid Agreement (MMAA): The Master Mutual Aid Agreement is an agreement made and entered into by and between the State of California, its various departments and agencies, and the various political subdivisions, municipal corporations, and other public agencies of the State of California to facilitate implementation of Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code entitled "California Emergency Services Act." Mutual aid agreements and the operational plans that support them, guide the sending and receiving parties in managing and providing effective aid to other operational areas in need. These plans are essential to identify specific resources, tasks, personnel, asset allocations, roles, responsibilities, integration, and actions that mutual aid participants execute respective to their assignments.

CA-ESF 3: Executive Construction and Engineering Annex: Emergency Support Function 3 (ESF-3) focuses on coordinating and providing public works and engineering support during emergencies and disasters, including:

- Assessing and repairing critical infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems, public buildings, and utilities.
- Ensuring the availability of essential services like clean water and sanitation.
- Coordinating with various agencies, including local public works departments and utility providers, to efficiently restore and maintain infrastructure functionality.

- Managing resources and personnel needed for infrastructure recovery efforts and collaborating with other emergency support functions to ensure a comprehensive and well-coordinated response in California.

As noted above, the California Department of General Services (DGS) implements ESF-3 under the guidance of the California Government Operations Agency (GovOps).

Related Legislation: AB 239 (Harabedian) of this Session. Would establish the State-Led County of Los Angeles Disaster Housing Task Force. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations)

AB 1200 (Caloza) of this Session. Requires Cal OES to conduct biennial, statewide tabletop exercises that simulate large-scale disasters and evaluate California's disaster response capabilities, as specified. (Set to be heard by the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management on April 28, 2025)

AB 1284 (Committee on Emergency Management) of this Session. Requires the Cal OES to develop a state recovery framework and assist local governments in the development of regional recovery frameworks for California's existing catastrophic plans and plans for Catastrophic Wildfires in the Wildland Urban Interface. (Pending in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations)

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

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