

Date of Hearing: August 26, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 1079 (Stern) – As Amended August 21, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 33-0

SUBJECT: Department of Forestry and Fire Protection: Fire Innovation Unit

SUMMARY: This bill establishes the Fire Innovation Unit (FIU) within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to serve as the Department's innovation arm for wildfire technology research, coordination, procurement, and deployment for technologies that, among other things, improve ecosystem and landscape scale resilience. The bill also establishes the Emergency Services Innovation Unit within the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to study, test, evaluate, and advise regarding procurement and statewide deployment of emerging technologies and tools that improve California's preparedness for, response to, mitigation of, and recovery from all hazards emergencies, as defined. Specifically, **this bill:**

1. Establishes the Emergency Services Innovation Unit (ESIU) within the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to study, test, evaluate, and advise regarding procurement and statewide deployment of emerging technologies and tools that improve California's preparedness for, response to, mitigation of, and recovery from all hazards emergencies, as defined.
2. Requires the ESIU to serve as an organizing resource for procuring and identifying emerging disaster technologies and assessing their applicability to statewide disaster coordination, mutual aid operations, public alert and warning, hazard mitigation, disaster intelligence, and other critical emergency functions.
3. Authorizes the ESIU to do the following:
 - a. Developing a balanced, multimodal research and development program designed to identify, research, test, procure, and evaluate emerging technologies and tools that support statewide emergency management across all hazards, as specified.
 - b. Consult with public, private, nonprofit, academic, tribal, and other entities to identify advances in emergency preparedness and response relevant to the Mutual Aid System and the Standardized Emergency Management System.
 - c. Make recommendations to state, local, federal, and tribal entities on technologies and tools that are effective for procurement and statewide integration into emergency operations
4. Authorizes the ESIU to collaborate with the FIREScope Program, the FIU, local emergency management agencies, law enforcement agencies, federal partners, utilities, academic institutions, and private sector developers to ensure consistency of standards, technology interoperability, and alignment with statewide emergency management structures.

5. Authorizes the EISU to administer pilot, prototype, testing, or demonstration projects and may enter into contracts, cooperative agreements, memoranda of understanding, or grant agreements with governmental entities, tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, research institutions, utilities, and private technology developers for purposes of evaluating, validating, and deploying technologies that support statewide emergency coordination.
6. Requires on or before January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, Cal OES to submit a report to the Governor and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature summarizing the following activities of the ESIU:
 - a. Technologies and projects evaluated, tested, or deployed.
 - b. Findings regarding cost effectiveness and operational performance.
 - c. Partnerships and funding sources leveraged to support innovation activities.
7. Provides the ESIU is to be implemented upon appropriation by the Legislature.
8. Sunsets, effective January 1, 2033, the authorization to establish the ESIU.
9. Authorizes the Department of General Services (DGS) to assume administration of a contract awarded on or before January 1, 2033, and establish the contract as a leveraged procurement agreement available for use by state agencies, local governments, and, through a participating addendum, public agencies in other states, provided that the vendor consents to the expanded terms, upon request of CAL Fire or Cal OES.
10. Establishes within CAL FIRE a FIU to serve as CAL FIRE's innovation arm for wildfire technology research, coordination, procurement, and deployment for technologies that improve ecosystem and landscape scale resilience, community risk reduction, ignition reduction, early detection, fast fire suppression, and decision support tools.
11. Defines "innovative technology" to mean an information technology good or service, or any technology, device, system, method, or application, that represents a novel approach, applies existing technology in a manner not previously used commercially or in a materially different operational context, or employs emerging capabilities not yet widely available in the marketplace.
12. Authorizes an authorized unit, defined as the FIU or the ESIU, to award a contract for innovative technology designed to support wildfire or disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, or response, without competitive solicitation, to a vendor that has completed a pilot, prototype, or demonstration project, and has received a written formal validation from the authorized unit based on documented results.
13. Authorizes an awarded contract to be structured as a multiphase agreement. Provides that the scope of any contract shall be limited to the use case evaluated during the pilot or demonstration project.
14. Requires an awarding department to submit to the Department of General Services (DGS) for validation findings, proposed contract or phase scope, and budget; authorizes DGS to object only if proposed scope materially exceeds the validated technology's demonstrated

capabilities; and specifies if DGS does not object in writing within 30 days of receipt, the awarding department may proceed with the contract or phase activation as proposed.

15. Exempts any aforementioned contracts from existing contracting prohibitions, as specified.
16. Authorizes contracts entered into before January 1, 2033, to remain valid until the expiration of the contract.
17. Requires the FIU to consist of the existing Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development (Office) and two new programs created by the bill: the Innovation, Outreach, and Coordination Program (IOCP) and the Rapid Acquisition and Deployment Program (RADP).
18. Authorizes functions of the Office related to scientific and technical evaluations, laboratory and field tests, operational evaluations, recommendations, as specified, to support CAL FIRE.
19. Authorizes functions of the IOCP related to governmental coordination, serving as a liaison to specified entities, and, facilitating information sharing, among other things, to support CAL FIRE.
20. Authorizes RADP to pilot wildfire technologies and manage the Wildfire Innovation Program, among other things.
21. Provides that nothing in this bill precludes the FIU from collaborating with CalOES, the FIREScope Program, or other state, local, tribal, federal, or private entities on shared initiatives that best meet the interests of the state.
22. Providing that nothing in this bill shall be construed to limit, supersede, or otherwise affect the authority of the Office of Emergency Services to administer, coordinate, and operate the Mutual Aid System.
23. Provides specified authorizations to the FIU, including:
 - a. To enter into various types of agreements.
 - b. To consult with and invite participation from relevant state agencies.
 - c. To establish and administer a Wildfire Innovation Program.
 - d. To administer or monitor specified pilot, prototype, or demonstration projects.
 - e. To authorize use of flexible contracting authorities.
 - f. To collaborate with public and private educational and research institutions to support CAL FIRE efforts.
 - g. To provide technical expertise, operational data, field testing environments, and appropriate funding.
 - h. To establish testbeds to test or evaluate emerging technologies.
 - i. To provide technical assistance to local, state, tribal, federal, and international fire agencies to facilitate deployment of wildfire-related technologies.

- j. To maintain a publicly available resource, including, but not limited to, an information bulletin, to provide visibility into technologies evaluated, piloted, or deployed.
 - k. To provide opportunities to participate in demonstrations, pilot programs, and field testing.
24. Requires the FIU to seek operational feedback from participating local, state, tribal, federal, and international fire agencies, and where appropriate, state agencies.
25. Requires, on or before January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, CAL FIRE to submit to the Governor and the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature a report summarizing specified information.
26. Requires the director to implement this bill only upon an appropriation by the Legislature for its purposes in the annual Budget Act or another statute.
27. Sunsets the provisions of this bill on January 1, 2033.

EXISTING LAW:

1. Requires the Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and CAL FIRE to jointly establish the Wildfire Forecast and Threat Intelligence Integration Center to collect, assess, and analyze threat indicators that could lead to catastrophic wildfires, reduce the likelihood and severity of wildfire incidents, and develop and share intelligence products related to wildfires. (Government Code (GC) 8586.7)
2. Establishes the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development (Office) within CAL FIRE to study, test, and advise regarding procurement of emerging technologies and tools in order to more effectively prevent and suppress wildfires within the state. The office shall serve as the central organizing hub for the state government's identification of emerging wildfire technologies. Sunsets the Office on January 1, 2029. (GC 8586.8)
3. Requires a state agency to secure at least three competitive bids or proposals for each contract. Exempts certain contracts from this requirement, including a contract that is with another state agency, a local governmental entity, an auxiliary organization of the California State University, or an auxiliary organization of a California community college. Specifies, however, that these contracts shall not be used to circumvent competitive bidding requirements. (Public Contracts Code Section 10340)

FISCAL EFFECT: There is no fiscal analysis on current language that includes the establishment of the ESIU. According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee reviewing bill language from April 28, 2026:

- 1) CAL FIRE estimates General Fund costs of approximately \$2.1 million in year one and \$1.9 million in year two and ongoing for seven positions, training, and travel; to evaluate and pilot emerging technologies; and to comply with the other requirements in the bill.

As discussed below, the OWTR already exists within CAL FIRE and is funded and staffed using existing CAL FIRE resources. And while CAL FIRE has information about a FIU and IOCP on its website, the department notes that neither the unit nor the program

formally exist; this bill seeks to codify these informal efforts. CAL FIRE notes it would need to transition staffing and resources currently assigned to its OWTR into the new FIU should this bill go into effect. The RADP and the Wildfire Innovation Grant Program proposed in the bill would be entirely new programs for CAL FIRE.

- 2) Cost pressures of an unknown but potentially significant amount (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds) to fund grants under the proposed Wildfire Innovation Grant Program, should CAL FIRE opt to establish the program. The bill does not specify the number or size of the grants to be awarded under the program.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: "California is home to some of the most innovative companies and researchers in the world, yet our state can still struggle to get promising technology out of a pilot program and into the hands of the first responders who need it. Traditional procurement works well when government already knows exactly what it wants to buy. Innovation is different. We often know the problem we need to solve before we know which technology will solve it. California has already demonstrated through the Request for Innovative Ideas process that government can work with innovators to test new approaches to difficult problems. SB 1079 builds on that work by creating dedicated innovation units within CAL FIRE and Cal OES and establishing a responsible pathway to move technologies from testing to deployment. The principle is simple: test what is promising, validate what works, and get proven technology into the field."

Equity Statement: "SB 1079 is expected to have indirect positive equity impacts by improving the state's ability to deploy technologies that protect communities from wildfires and other disasters. Wildfires and disasters do not affect all communities equally. Rural communities, low-income communities, communities with limited evacuation routes or infrastructure, older adults, people with disabilities, and communities located in areas with high wildfire or other disaster risk can face greater challenges preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. Technologies that improve early detection, situational awareness, communications, evacuation, responder safety, forecasting, or rapid response can therefore provide particular benefits to communities where response time and access to emergency resources are especially consequential. The bill does not establish different eligibility requirements or services based on race, income, geography, or other demographic characteristics. Rather, it strengthens the state's overall capacity to identify and deploy technologies that can reduce disaster risk and improve emergency response. The innovation units will also provide an opportunity for CAL FIRE and Cal OES to identify operational problems experienced by communities and first responders and seek technological solutions designed around those needs, rather than limiting state procurement to products already available through traditional channels."

77.2 Re-referral: SB 1079 was re-referred to the Assembly Emergency Management Committee pursuant to Assembly Rule 77.2. The amendments that triggered a re-referral are related to establishing the Emergency Services Innovation Unit within Cal OES.

This analysis will primarily focus on the amendments adopted after the bill was heard by this committee. A more expansive analysis of the pre-existing language is available in the prior Emergency Management analysis for this bill.

Innovation Units: The importance of developing new emerging technologies is crucial as the scale, quantity, and frequency of natural disasters continues to rise. The Fire Innovation Unit (FIU) was established in partnership with FireWERX and serves as CAL FIRE's innovation accelerator by connecting firefighters, technology developers, researchers, and industry partners to identify and evaluate emerging technologies that address operational challenges. While CAL FIRE already operates a Fire Innovation Unit administratively through its partnership with FireWERX, this bill would primarily codify and formalize existing efforts in statute, with new language modifying powers.

Unlike the FIU, the proposed Emergency Services Innovation Unit (ESIU) does not currently exist. Under this bill, the ESIU is tasked with the following responsibilities: studying, testing, evaluating, and advising procurement and statewide deployment of emerging technologies that seek to improve California's emergency preparedness efforts. As mentioned above, and in the original SB 1079 analysis by this Committee, the FIU is already operated by CALIFIRE (through FireWERX). The latest version of this bill would create a new unit, the ESIU, modeled after the mostly established FIU. However, as a new unit, the ESIU will not have similar existing partnerships, resources, and research capabilities as the FIU. Innovation is key to enhancing disaster resilience and addressing challenges presented by extreme weather events and emergencies, but the Committee may wish to review whether this bill positions ESIU to meet their expected goals for innovation and whether there is enough time to fully evaluate this new policy before session ends.

Technical Expertise: The Department of General Services (DGS) serves as the "business manager" of the state, providing a variety of services to state agencies through procurement and acquisition solution. While the amendments that incorporate DGS procurement authority provide some level of contract oversight, DGS does not possess the technical expertise necessary for the deployment of emerging technologies.

This bill would place the onus on Cal OES to evaluate, test, and deploy these innovative technologies and projects. However, recent issues with the Next Generation 911 (NG-911) system have raised concerns about technological expertise and capacity at Cal OES. NG-911 has been the center of an oversight hearing, an in-depth analysis and report from the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO), and policy and budget proposals to address a myriad of concerns.^{1,2} One of the issues with the deployment of the NG-911 system has been technical failures inappropriately dealt with due to lack of oversight and technical proficiency to respond to challenges. Although an innovation unit that modernizes how emerging technologies are procured, tested, and validated has valuable potential, concerns remain that issues seen in NG-911 deployment may be replicated. The Committee may wish to consider further specifying what internal technical expertise or external oversight may be necessary to implement the EISU.

Exemptions: Current bill language creates guidelines for securing bids or proposals for contracts for innovative technologies to support fire or disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, or response. These guidelines, however, waive competitive solicitation, providing blanket exemptions for bid or proposal applicants and future awardees. There are several drawbacks to

¹ Oversight Hearing: California's Next Generation 9-1-1 System: Oversight of Delays, Costs, and the Path Forward <https://www.assembly.ca.gov/media/assembly-emergency-management-committee-20260317>

² The 2026-27 Budget: Office of Emergency Services Next Generation 911 System, Legislative Analyst Office, <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5145>

bids or proposals without competitive solicitation. Competitive procurement values transparency, fairness, open competition, and prevents redundancy and structural consolidation. California Public Contract Code Section 100 formally ensures the state of California is in full compliance with competitive bidding statutes as a means of protecting the public from misuse of public funds and to eliminate favoritism, fraud, and corruption in the awarding of public contracts. While exemptions exist to consider emergencies, extreme administrative burdens, or technical realities, they are narrowly defined to prevent the abuse of public funds and preserve the integrity of open competition. The Committee may wish to consider whether these exemptions are necessary for these technologies and projects, whether they should amend out the procurement portions and revisit the issue next session, and whether they would like this policy to be reviewed by the committee with primary jurisdiction (Governmental Organization Committee).

Arguments in Support: Megafire Action, sponsors of the bill, as well as a collection of firefighters, mitigation professionals, foresters, technologists, scientists, policy experts, researchers, industry leaders, and community advocates, write in support, “SB 1079 builds on the innovation capacity CAL FIRE has already begun developing. The department’s existing Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development currently serves as a central hub for identifying emerging technologies, but functions primarily as an information-gathering channel rather than a structured pathway for testing, validating, procuring, and deploying solutions. SB 1079 expands that foundation into a complete innovation pipeline, including pilots, demonstrations, testbeds, grant support, academic partnerships, and pathways for rapid operational adoption.”

Additional Committee Consideration: The Committee may wish to consider drafting amendments to this bill based on considerations identified in this analysis.

Related Legislation:

SB 109 (Dodd), Chapters 239, Statutes of 2021. This bill established the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development (OWTRD) within CALFIRE to serve as the central organizing hub for the State government’s identification of emerging wildfire technologies. This bill also established the Wildfire Technology Research and Development Advisory Review Board.

AB 441 (Hadwick) of this Session. This bill would have extended the sunset on the OWTRD to January 1, 2031. Held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 973 (Becker) of this Session. This bill would direct CAL FIRE to implement specified wildfire risk and resilience related activities and formalize CAL FIRE’s partnership with the California Fire Safe Council to administer and deliver the Wildfire County Coordinator Program. Pending in the Senate.

SB 326 (Becker, 2025) requires the deputy director of Community Wildfire Preparedness within CAL FIRE to prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast (Forecast), and a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report. Requires, contingent upon an appropriation, CAL FIRE provides local assistance to local governments to achieve wildfire risk reduction consistent with the aforementioned plans, for defensible space inspections, and to facilitate compliance with forthcoming ember-resistant zone (known as zone o) regulations. Vetoes.

HR 6094/S 3190 – Fire Innovation Unit Act (Rep. Kim, R-CA) (Sen. Curtis, R-UT): 11/18/2025
Read twice and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

HR 836 – Emergency Wildfire Fighting Technology Act of 2025 (Rep. Valadao, R CA-22):
Senate - 02/06/2025 Received in the Senate and Read twice and referred to the Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Megafire Action
California Fire Chiefs Association
Fire Districts Association of California
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
City of Berkeley
Calforests
California Fire Safe Council
California Forward
Climate Resolve
DAN Munsey, Fire Chief of the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (on Behalf of
Himself)
Del Norte Fire Safe Council
Fire Aside
Fire Districts Association of California
FireWERX
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Muon Space
Napa Communities Firewise Foundation
Net-Zero California
Pacific Forest Trust
Rain
RockRose Risk
Safe Community Project
San Bernardino County
The Tahoe Fund

Opposition

None on file.

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