
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1153 (Caballero) - Disaster preparedness: urban retail water suppliers and public water systems: wildfire

Version: April 28, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 11, 2026

Policy Vote: E.M. 8 - 0, N.R. & W. 5 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Janelle Miyashiro

Bill Summary: SB 1153, beginning January 1, 2028, requires all urban retail water suppliers serving high or very high fire hazard severity zones (FHSZs) to include incident-specific response procedures for wildfires as part of their disaster preparedness plans, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- The Office of Emergency Services (OES) reports ongoing General Fund costs of approximately \$237,000 to coordinate any necessary updates or re-reviews of county emergency plans.
- The State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) do not anticipate a fiscal impact.

Background: Existing law defines an urban water supplier as one that provides potable (drinkable) water for municipal purposes and has at least 3,000 service connections or provides at least 3,000 acre-feet of water annually. (An acre-foot is approximately enough water to supply three California households' indoor and outdoor water needs for a year.) Urban water suppliers provide water for indoor and outdoor use for residents, as well as for businesses, manufacturers, and public service entities, such as schools and parks. They include retail water suppliers, which provide water directly to customers, and wholesale water suppliers, which sell water to retail suppliers. Many urban water suppliers are public entities, such as cities, counties, or special districts, while some are private investor-owned utilities. Medium and large public water systems that serve 3,300 or more connections are subject to the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) and must submit detailed vulnerability assessments and emergency response plans (ERPs) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Urban water supplier ERPs are required to include the following components:

- Strategies and resources to improve resilience, including physical security and cybersecurity.
- Plans and procedures for responding to a natural hazard or malevolent act that threatens safe drinking water.
- Actions and equipment to lessen the impact of a malevolent act or natural hazard, including alternative water sources, relocating intakes and flood protection barriers.

- Strategies to detect malevolent acts or natural hazards that threaten the system.

This bill adds wildfire response as it relates to mitigation actions to this list of required report elements.

Proposed Law:

- Beginning January 1, 2028, requires all urban retail water suppliers serving high or very high FHSZs to include incident-specific response procedures for wildfires as part of their disaster preparedness plans, including in any applicable emergency response plan. Plans shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:
 - Mitigation actions, including actions, procedures, and equipment, that can obviate or significantly lessen the impact of a wildfire on the water system and the supply of drinking water provided by that water supplier. Identification of mitigation actions within the plan shall consider system conditions, risks, operations, and available resources, including financial and staffing constraints.
 - Action to prepare for a wildfire, such as identification of critical infrastructure and coordination with local emergency responders, including, but not limited to, cities, counties, fire agencies, and law enforcement.
 - An assessment of the resilience of critical infrastructure in high or very high FHSZs. Requires the assessment to identify critical infrastructure, such as water pumps, water tanks, and backup electrical generation equipment, and include an evaluation of fire hardening measures and alternative emergency power in the event of a loss of power, including, but not limited to, onsite backup generators, portable generators, or availability of alternative water sources.
 - Actions to respond to a wildfire, such as identifying immediate response actions, including a plan to prepare water tanks during a red flag warning, and a communications strategy to communicate with customers.
 - Actions to recover from a wildfire, such as completion of water system damage assessments and development of a long-term adaptation measures.
- Requires urban retail water suppliers to provide the above incident response procedures to the county Office of Emergency Services.
- Provides that both of the following apply while public water systems, including wholesale water systems, are available to aid in firefighting activity:
 - The inability of a public water system to maintain water supply or water pressure during a wildfire shall not be considered a substantial cause of the damages resulting from a wildfire.
 - The spread of wildfire shall not be considered an inherent risk presented by the deliberate design, construction, or maintenance of a public water system.

- Provides that nothing in the bill shall be interpreted to impose a duty on public water systems, including wholesale water systems, to design, construct, or maintain a water system for wildfire defense or suppression. Further clarifies that identified mitigation actions do not guarantee water supply or pressure during a wildfire, and a supplier's failure to implement or comply with such actions shall not be considered a substantial cause of the damages resulting from a wildfire.
- Provides that nothing in the bill shall be construed to limit or affect liability for injury or damage resulting from a negligent act or omission of an entity operating a public water system for its intended purpose and function, as specified.
- States legislative findings and declarations.

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