Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS
Damon Connolly, Chair
SB 1153 (Caballero) – As Amended June 22, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 33-0

SUBJECT: Disaster preparedness: urban retail water suppliers and public water systems: wildfire

SUMMARY: Requires, beginning January 1, 2028, all urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to include incident-specific response procedures for wildfires in their disaster preparedness plans. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Makes legislative findings about the role and limitations of public water systems in wildfire defense and suppression.

2) Requires, beginning January 1, 2028, all urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to include incident-specific response procedures for wildfires (response procedures for wildfires) as part of their disaster preparedness plans, including in any applicable emergency response plan (ERP) as required by the federal Safe Drinking Water (SDWA).

3) Requires the response procedures for wildfires to include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

    a) 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. Requires that identification of mitigation actions within the plan consider system conditions, risks, operations, and available resources, including financial and staffing constraints.

    b) Actions to prepare for a wildfire, such as identification of critical infrastructure and coordination with local emergency responders, including, but not limited to, cities, counties, offices of emergency services, fire agencies, and law enforcement.

    c) An assessment of the resilience of critical infrastructure located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone. Requires the assessment to identify critical infrastructure, such as water pumps, water tanks, applicable pipelines, and backup electrical generation equipment; assess the risk wildfire poses to the identified critical infrastructure; 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.

    d) 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.

e) Actions to recover from a wildfire, such as completion of water system damage assessments and development of long-term adaptation measures.

4) Provides that the requirements of the bill do not change the confidentiality level for information provided pursuant to the provisions above, including the right to withhold or redact records pursuant to applicable exceptions to disclosure within the California Public Records Act, as specified.

5) Requires that the response procedures for wildfire required pursuant to the bill be provided by the urban retail water supplier to the county Office of Emergency Services, subject to the confidentiality provisions above.

6) Requires urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to review their disaster preparedness plans at least once every five years and to update those plans as necessary.

7) Provides that nothing in this 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.

8) Provides that while an urban retail water supplier, as specified, shall be required to include response procedures for wildfires in their disaster preparedness plans pursuant to this bill, the identified mitigation actions pursuant to those response procedures for wildfires shall inform preparedness and response planning, and shall not be construed to guarantee the ability of a public water system to maintain water supply or water pressure during a wildfire.

9) Provides that neither the failure of an urban retail water supplier to implement or comply with any actions identified in this bill nor the inability of any public water system to maintain water supply or water pressure during a wildfire shall be considered a substantial cause of the damages resulting from a wildfire.

10) Provides that nothing in this 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 of providing water for human consumption, as described in statute, and any other applicable laws and regulations governing system operations.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Establishes the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the Governor's Office under the supervision of the Director of Emergency Services. Vests Cal OES with responsibility for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies, including responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property. (Government Code (GC) § 8585 et seq.))

2) Requires all public water systems with 10,000 or more service connections to review and revise their disaster preparedness plans in conjunction with related agencies, including, but not limited to, local fire departments, and Cal OES to ensure that the plans are sufficient to

address possible disaster scenarios. Provides that these plans should examine and review pumping station and distribution facility operations during an emergency; water pressure at both pumping stations and hydrants; and, whether there is sufficient water reserve levels and alternative emergency power, including, but not limited to, onsite backup generators and portable generators. (GC § 8607.2 (a))

3) Requires all public water systems with 10,000 or more service connections, following a declared state of emergency, to furnish an assessment of their emergency response and recommendations to the Legislature within six months after each disaster, as well as implement the recommendations in a timely manner. (GC § 8607.2 (b))

4) Requires the State Fire Marshal to identify, as specified, areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. (GC § 51178)

5) Finds that water service is a different and distinct service from fire service, and that water service is a property-related service that aids in the provision of fire service provided to properties. (GC § 53750.5 (a)(1))

6) Finds that hydrants are generally designed, installed, and used to provide an immediately available water service to aid in extinguishing fires that threaten property served by a water service provider, and are generally not designed or installed to provide water service to aid in extinguishing fires that threaten property not served by a water service provider or wildfires. Finds that hydrants are also used by a water service provider for water system operations and maintenance. (GC § 53750.5 (a)(3))

7) Requires the State Fire Marshal to classify, as specified, lands within state responsibility areas into fire hazard severity zones. (Public Resources Code § 4202 and 4204)

8) Authorizes, pursuant to the federal SDWA, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to set standards for drinking water quality and to oversee the states, localities, and water suppliers who implement those standards. (42 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 300 (f) et seq.)

9) Requires, pursuant to the federal SDWA, community water systems that serve more than 3,300 people to:

    a) Complete a risk and resilience assessment (RRA) that includes assessments of, among other items, the risk to the system from malevolent acts and natural hazards; the resilience of the pipes and constructed conveyances; physical barriers, water collection, and intake; pretreatment, treatment, storage, and distribution facilities; and, electronic, computer, or other automated systems (including the security of such systems) that are utilized by the system; and,

    b) Prepare or revise, where necessary, an emergency response plan (ERP) that incorporates findings of the RRA. Requires the ERP to include, among other items, plans and procedures that can be implemented, and identification of equipment that can be utilized, in the event of a malevolent act or natural hazard; and, actions, procedures, and equipment that can obviate or significantly lessen the impact of a malevolent act or

natural hazard on the public health and the safety and supply of drinking water. (42 U.S.C. § 300 (i-2))

10) Establishes the California SDWA to provide for the operation of public water systems and imposes on the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) various responsibilities and duties relating to the regulation of drinking water to protect public health. (Health & Safety Code (HSC) § 116270 et seq.)

11) Requires water suppliers to identify and provide to the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (VC OES) no later than May 1, 2026, all critical fire suppression infrastructure or alternative sources of water. (Water Code § 7080)

12) Requires a water supplier to establish, in coordination with VC OES and Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD), an emergency preparedness plan, as specified, for response to major power outages or emergencies that pose a potential threat to providing water service. (Water Code § 7080)

13) Requires a water supplier to notify VC OES within 3 business days, or as soon as it becomes aware, during a fire event, of any reduction in its water delivery capacity that could substantially hinder firefighting operations or significantly delay the replenishment of reservoirs. (Water Code § 7080)

14) Defines "public water system" as a system for the provision of water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed conveyances that has 15 or more service connections or regularly serves an average of at least 25 individuals daily at least 60 days out of the year. (HSC § 116275)

15) Defines "urban retail water supplier" as a supplier, either publicly or privately owned, that directly provides municipal water to more than 3,000 customers or that supplies more than 3,000 acre-feet of water annually at retail for municipal purposes. (Water Code § 10608.12)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill: According to the author,

"As wildfires become more frequent, unpredictable, and destructive across California, misunderstandings about how public water systems operate have shaped public expectations and contributed to perceptions that these systems may not have performed as designed during wildfire events.

SB 1153 clarifies the role and limitations of public water systems when responding to wildfires as approved to responding to structure fires.

SB 1153 will enhance wildfire preparedness efforts by requiring all urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zones to include wildfire response procedures as part of their existing emergency response plans.

Lastly, SB 1153 establishes in statute that water supply or pressure limitations during a wildfire event are not a substantial cause of wildfire damages and that wildfire spread is not an inherent risk of water system design.

SB 1153 supports proactive planning by public water systems, the experts on their own infrastructure and operational needs, to prepare for wildfire events. The bill acknowledges the physical and financial limitations of local water infrastructure and addresses misunderstandings about the capabilities of these systems that have contributed to increased claims and litigation for wildfire damages. These costs are ultimately borne by ratepayers, impacting water affordability.

California must acknowledge the limited role our public water systems were originally designed to occupy, support their efforts to adapt to climate change, and prepare for future long-term investments in disaster response."

Wildfires in California: According to the California Air Resources Board, climate change, primarily caused by the burning of fossil fuels, is increasing the frequency and severity of wildfires in California and around the world. Since 1950, the area burned by California wildfires has increased each year largely because spring and summer temperatures are increasing and spring snowmelt occurs earlier. The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) noted in 2022 that the area burned by wildfires and the number of large fires (10,000 acres or more) across the state had increased markedly over the previous 20 years—trends influenced by altered fuel conditions and climate change. Wildfires in 2020 burned an unprecedented 4 million acres across California. In 2021, about 2.6 million acres burned, making it the second highest burn year, followed by 2018, when 1.5 million acres burned. In other data, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) stated in 2024 that half of the state's 20 largest fires in recorded history had occurred over the previous five years, with all but one of the state's largest fires occurring in the 21st century. CAL FIRE data also show that four out of the five most destructive wildfires in California history happened in just the previous 10 years. In 2025, the Eaton and Palisades Fires in Los Angeles County destroyed over 16,000 structures and burned 38,000 acres combined; in 2018, the Camp Fire in Butte County destroyed nearly 19,000 structures and burned 153,000 acres; and in 2017, the Tubbs Fire in Napa and Sonoma counties destroyed more than 5,500 structures and burned nearly 37,000 acres. The State Water Board notes that public water systems can sustain heavy impacts during a wildfire.

Water infrastructure and wildfires: Water infrastructure and wildfires are inextricably and complexly linked. The December 2021 University of California policy brief, "Wildfire & Water Supply in California: Advancing a Research & Policy Agenda," describes the distinct dilemma California faces regarding the wildfire and water supply interface as follows:

"California’s current and expected intensity in future fire regimes presents new challenges for community water supply planners in many parts of the state. Wildfire is one of several climate threats that water utility planners are expected to account for, and the approximately 2,800 community water systems in the state have vastly different planning and operational capacities. Wildfire may threaten the processes to secure, store, treat, and deliver reliable water supplies to first responders and communities. The scale of the problem is evident in a recent Department of Water Resources estimate that "over half of the top at-risk [water] suppliers are in high or very high-risk zones for wildfire, as defined by [CAL FIRE]" (2020

Water Resilience Portfolio). This is a water equity issue that leaves (often already vulnerable) communities to deal with compounding disasters.

The ability of water systems to maintain power during wildfires is critical for supporting firefighting efforts and minimizing damage to infrastructure. As systems divert water supply to help fight wildfire, and as fires contaminate water sources, water suppliers face impairments to both water quantity and quality in their mandate to maintain reliable water delivery to communities."

The January 2026 University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Luskin Center for Innovation report, "Water Systems' Wildfire Fighting Capacities and Expectations," (2026 UCLA Luskin report) further describes the pressure on water systems by stating, "Wildfires are becoming more frequent, intense, and destructive across the western United States, sharpening public attention on the performance and responsibilities of urban water systems during major fire events. Although water distribution systems are designed primarily to provide drinking water, domestic supply, and support for routine structure fires, recent disasters—most notably the January 2025 Los Angeles fires—have fueled unprecedented expectations for their role in fighting large urban wildfires."

Water systems and recent California fires: The Assembly Committee on Emergency Management, in their analysis of this bill, highlighted water access issues in the face of recent California wildfires, including:

"*Public Water Access Overwhelmed in the Palisades Fire*: In the early days of the 2025 catastrophic Palisades Fire, extreme winds made it impossible for aerial firefighting to continue, putting a significant strain on the public water system. According to Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, water use spiked to four times the normal level for over 15 hours, leaving some hydrants dry. While there was no overall water shortage, the sheer demand overwhelmed the system, preventing water tanks from refilling fast enough to maintain the pressure needed to reach higher-elevation areas in the Palisades.

Governor Newsom subsequently directed California water and fire officials to prepare an independent after-incident report to determine what caused the loss of water supply and pressure in municipal systems during the fire and identify measures to reduce the likelihood that something like this happens again during future fires. The resulting November 2025 report titled, "Palisades Fire and Water Supply Analysis," included the following in its findings and recommendations:

- Water systems are designed to meet their primary purpose of providing clean drinking water, which limits the types of engineering considerations that would likely be needed for a water system capable of combatting large conflagrations engulfing hundreds of structures such as the one in Palisades.

- Prepositioning and a multi-pronged approach involving firefighting and emergency responder organizations is essential to combatting wildfires under extreme weather-driven conditions.

Ventura County Water Access Issues: During the Mountain Fire in November 2024, some of Ventura County's water providers experienced a significant delay in restoring operations

after losing power. According to Calleguas Municipal Water District, the utility pump was without electricity for several hours and did not receive a generator until late that evening, resulting in water supply challenges. The Mountain Fire also disrupted firefighting efforts in the Camarillo foothills, where two water pumps went offline during active fire suppression. This interruption delayed the refilling of hillside water tanks, which are critical for maintaining water pressure in high-elevation fire hydrants. This eventually led to the fire hydrants running dry. During the 2017 Thomas Fire, similar disruptions occurred when several water pumping stations lost power. In Ojai, the fire caused direct damage to the infrastructure, rendering the water system inoperable.

Carr Fire Impacts to California Water Systems: In July and August 2018, the 230,000-acre Carr Fire impacted the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area in Shasta County, California, which destroyed the system's main office and two pump stations. Power outages combined with undersized generators led to treatment process disruptions for some systems.

Tubbs Fire and Public Water Inaccessibility: During the initial hours of the December 2017 Tubbs fire, the fire hydrants in the hilltop community of Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa repeatedly lost pressure. Firefighters were forced to travel to the valley of Santa Rosa, where water pressure was stronger, and then return to the hilltop to fight the fire."

These fires, among others, have increased public attention on the role water systems play in suppressing wildfires.

Water systems' role in suppressing wildfires: The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation notes that in recent years, fires have begun revealing a hidden vulnerability: our urban water systems. Water utilities are built to support drinking water needs and to fight structure fires in neighborhoods; most have not been designed or enabled to respond to large wildland-urban fire events. The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation details this situation further in their published factsheet, "Do Urban Water Supply Systems Put Out Wildfires?"

"Urban water supply systems are not designed to fight large wildfires or large-scale fires that start in wildland areas and spread to urban areas. They have not been expected to do so in the past, but these systems have gotten more attention recently as wildfires have affected urban areas more frequently. The expectation for urban water systems is to provide enough water to fight smaller-scale urban structural fires that are not fueled by wildland vegetation.

A key concept in firefighting water supply is fire flow — the amount of water a system is expected by regulators to provide to fight urban fires. The piped water infrastructure of the urban system is engineered to be sufficiently pressurized to ensure adequate fire flow for urban firefighting. Pressurization is achieved either by gravity (for example, using elevated reservoirs that push water downward) or electric pumps that push water through the system.

In some fire-prone areas, urban water supply systems may provide some additional capacity to fight wildfires, but the role of this water supply is usually limited. There are no government-mandated guidelines for urban water systems to provide large-scale wildfire support."

Disaster preparedness plans: California water systems are currently required, by state and federal law, to have plans in place for disasters. California statute (GC § 8607.2 (a)) requires all

public water systems in the state with 10,000 or more service connections to review and revise their disaster preparedness plans in conjunction with related agencies, including, but not limited to, local fire departments and Cal OES, to ensure that the plans are sufficient to address possible disaster scenarios. These plans should examine and review pumping station and distribution facility operations during an emergency; water pressure at both pumping stations and hydrants; and, whether there is sufficient water reserve levels and alternative emergency power, including, but not limited to, onsite backup generators and portable generators.

Federal emergency response plans: America's Water Infrastructure Act, which was signed into law on October 23, 2018, amended Section 1433 of the federal SDWA to require community water systems serving more than 3,300 people to develop or update risk and resilience assessments (RRAs) and emergency response plans (ERPs). The law specifies the components that RRAs and ERPs must include, and establishes deadlines by which water systems must certify to US EPA completion of the RRA and ERP. Every five years, utilities are required to review the RRA and submit a recertification to US EPA that the assessment has been reviewed and, if necessary, revised.

According to the US EPA, RRAs include the evaluation of vulnerabilities, threats, and consequences from malevolent acts and natural hazards, including: physical barriers; source water; pipes and constructed conveyances; water collection and intake; pretreatment and treatment; storage and distribution facilities; electronic, computer, or other automated systems (including the security of such systems); monitoring practices; financial infrastructure; the use, storage, or handling of chemicals; and, operation and maintenance of the system.

The SDWA requires that no later than six months after certifying completion of its RRA, each community water system must prepare or revise an ERP that incorporates the findings of the RRA. The SDWA requires that ERPs include:

a) Strategies and resources to improve resilience, including physical security and cybersecurity;
b) Plans and procedures for responding to a natural hazard or malevolent act that threatens safe drinking water;
c) Actions and equipment to lessen the impact of a malevolent act or natural hazard, including alternative water sources, relocating intakes, and flood protection barriers; and,
d) Strategies to detect malevolent acts or natural hazards that threaten the system.

SDWA Section 1433 also states that US EPA should provide guidance and technical assistance to water systems that serve less than 3,300 people on how to conduct RRAs and ERPs, though these systems are not required to certify completion to US EPA.

The Association of California Water Agencies notes that water agencies can satisfy the requirements that California Government Code Section 8607.2 places on agencies (to prepare disaster preparedness plans) through completion of the newer ERPs required by the federal SDWA.

The 2026 UCLA Luskin report states, "There are currently no standard requirements or formalized best practices for water supply systems to fight wildfires in the United States. The Safe Drinking Water Act, as implemented by the California State Water Resources Control Board, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency both offer some best practices and system support materials on wildfire impacts to community water systems. However, based on our

review of existing resources, oversight agencies have historically provided little guidance on the wildfire response role of water systems... The most relevant requirement under the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA)— which only applies to large water systems—is to have updated Emergency Response Plans and Risk and Resilience Assessments. But in their current form, these plans and assessments are inadequate for a focus on wildfire fighting, much less a detailed concept of operations."

This bill: This bill expands upon federal and state requirements by requiring, beginning January 1, 2028, all urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to include incident-specific response procedures for wildfires (response procedures for wildfires) in their disaster preparedness plans, including in any applicable ERP as required by the federal SDWA.

Specifically, this bill requires the response procedures for wildfires to 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; actions to prepare for a wildfire, such as identification of critical infrastructure and coordination with local emergency responders, including, but not limited to, cities, counties, offices of emergency services, fire agencies, and law enforcement; an assessment of the resilience of critical infrastructure, as specified, located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone; actions, as specified, to respond to a wildfire, such as identifying immediate response actions; and, actions to recover from a wildfire, such as completion of water system damage assessments and development of long-term adaptation measures.

This bill also requires urban retail water suppliers to provide their response procedures for wildfire to the county Office of Emergency Services, and to review their disaster preparedness plans at least once every five years and to update those plans as necessary.

Clarification that public water systems do not have an affirmative duty to stop wildfires: According to the Assembly Judiciary Committee,

> "Legal liability arises when one person (or entity) has a legal duty to another and fails to follow through with that duty. That failure can take the form or act affirmative action that harms another or an omission or failure to act that results in harm. For example, when driving, all Californians owe each other a duty exercise "reasonable care in driving a vehicle," which includes lookout for pedestrians, obstacles, and other vehicles while maintaining a safe speed. (California Civil Jury Instructions- CACI No. 700.)
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> As it relates to this bill, the measure explicitly states that nothing in the bill is to, "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." While Committee staff have found no published case or statutory law imposing such a duty, and thus such a duty presumably does not presently exist, it appears that the water agencies backing this bill fear that the development of procedures to be utilized during a wildfire may be interpreted as a duty to put out the fire.
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> While it seems unreasonable that an urban system would ever have a duty to put out a wildfire being driven by potentially gale-force winds, one can understand the concern that

adopting the wildfire plan proposed by this bill may be interpreted as imposing a legal duty and setting a legal standard of care. To the extent that state law doesn't currently impose a duty on urban water systems to put out wildfires, it seems imprudent that this bill's planning requirements would somehow be interpreted to do so. Accordingly, alleviating water agencies of the duty of wildfire defense or suppression seems reasonable, especially in light of the negligence provisions also provided in the bill."

This bill: This bill clarifies 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. It also provides that while an urban retail water supplier, as specified, shall be required to include response procedures for wildfires in their disaster preparedness plans pursuant to this bill, the identified mitigation actions pursuant to those response procedures for wildfires shall inform preparedness and response planning, and shall not be construed to guarantee the ability of a public water system to maintain water supply or water pressure during a wildfire. The bill further provides that neither the failure of an urban retail water supplier to implement or comply with any actions identified in this bill nor the inability of any public water system to maintain water supply or water pressure during a wildfire shall be considered a substantial cause of the damages resulting from a wildfire. Finally, the bill 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 of providing water for human consumption, as described in statute, and any other applicable laws and regulations governing system operations.

Arguments in support: A coalition of dozens of water suppliers, irrigation districts, special districts, water associations, and other related entities, writes in support of the bill,

"Over the last decade, California has faced some of the largest and most destructive wildfires in history, placing extraordinary demands on public water systems and customers. Despite these demands, public water systems are investing and taking actions to prepare for future wildfire events through emergency preparedness and planning actions, which vary based on the needs of the system and area of the state. Emergency preparedness and planning actions include infrastructure investments; drills and tabletop exercises with local government, fire departments, and other stakeholders to test communications and response systems ahead of wildfires; and emergency communication plans to notify customers about service impacts, water quality, advisories, and safety guidance during wildfire emergencies.

SB 1153 would build upon existing emergency planning requirements and strengthen wildfire preparedness by requiring all urban retail water suppliers serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone to incorporate a specific planning element regarding wildfire preparedness and response into their disaster preparedness and emergency response plans. The bill would require these plans to include, but not be limited to, (1) mitigation actions, procedures, and equipment that can obviate or significantly lessen the impacts of a wildfire on the water system and the supply of drinking water, (2) actions to prepare for a wildfire, including an assessment of the resilience of critical infrastructure located in a high or very high fire hazard severity zone and an evaluation of hardening measures and backup power, (3) actions to respond to a wildfire, and (4) actions to recover from a wildfire. The bill would require the plans to be reviewed at least once every five years and updated as necessary.

This bill would allow water suppliers, the experts on their systems, to develop preparedness strategies that reflect local conditions and operational needs. Water suppliers would have until January 1, 2028, to develop and incorporate wildfire response procedures within their plans, which would result in water agencies in high-risk areas developing their plans at the same time, therefore creating more opportunities for coordination and collaboration. Further, water suppliers would be required to provide their emergency response procedures for wildfire, subject to confidentiality provisions, to their county Office of Emergency Services.

In January of this year, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Luskin Center for Innovation published a report which synthesizes insights from a workshop of 42 experts representing water agencies, fire services, regulators, researchers, and technical assistance providers. The report stated that, "Participants reached a strong consensus that water systems have a limited and inherently constrained role in wildfire suppression. Hydrants, storage, and pipe networks are neither required nor engineered to deliver the sustained flows and pressures required to stop fastmoving, multi-block fires. Yet public perception, misinformation, and fragmented communication have created unrealistic expectations and, at times, misplaced blame. Workshop discussions emphasized the need for clearer communication with policymakers and the public; improved coordination among water systems, fire agencies, and emergency response entities; and careful evaluation of trade-offs in proposed infrastructure or operational interventions."

As wildfires become more frequent and destructive across California, misunderstandings of public water systems have led to unrealistic public expectations and have resulted in the public perception that water systems may have underperformed during a wildfire event. Following major wildfire events, public water systems have increasingly faced claims and lawsuits for wildfire damages. The financial burden of litigation is ultimately borne by customers, impacting water rates and affordability.

In alignment with UCLA's findings, SB 1153 would include legislative findings and declarations which illustrate that while public water systems are designed to aid in firefighting, they are not intentionally designed or constructed for wildfire defense or suppression and that doing so would be physically impracticable, financially infeasible, and may compromise the quality and affordability of water. The bill would also establish that 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 and that the spread of wildfire is not an inherent risk presented by the deliberate design, construction, or maintenance of a public water system. The bill would further clarify that the bill's provisions shall not be construed to limit or affect liability regarding acts of negligence.

SB 1153 improves wildfire preparedness while recognizing operational realities. California must acknowledge the limited role of our public water systems, support their efforts to adapt to climate change, and prepare for future long-term investments in disaster response."

Arguments in opposition: None on file.

Related legislation:

1) AB 2013 (Bennett, 2026). Would have required specified community water systems located in high or very high fire risk areas to provide an annex to their disaster preparedness plans that included specified information relating to system preparedness and resiliency during a

wildfire. This bill failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management on April 13, 2026.

2) AB 1873 (Bennett, 2026). Extends current requirements (per AB 367 below) for a Ventura County water supplier to provide backup power during an emergency; requires Ventura County water suppliers to notify the VC OES if backup power is not available within 90 minutes; sets a deadline for when the water supplier emergency plans must be completed; adds a new assessment requirement to existing reporting requirements; and, makes other clarifying changes. This bill is pending in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

3) AB 372 (Bennett, 2025). Establishes, contingent upon appropriation by the Legislature, the Rural Water Infrastructure for Wildfire Resilience Program for the distribution of state matching funds to urban wildland interface communities in high and very high fire hazard severity zones. This bill is on the inactive file on the Senate floor.

4) SB 746 (Alvarado-Gil, 2025). Requires the Department of Water Resources to establish the Urban Water Community Drought Relief program and the Small Community Drought Relief program to provide grants for interim or immediate drought relief. Authorizes funding for benefits in addition to drought relief, including, among other projects, projects that reduce the risk of wildfire for entire neighborhoods and communities through water delivery system improvements for fire suppression purposes in high fire hazard severity zone communities or very high fire hazard severity zone communities. This bill was held on the suspense file of the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

5) AB 367 (Bennett, Chapter 690, Statutes of 2025). 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 the county Office of Emergency Services of significant water delivery reductions, as specified. Requires the Ventura County Fire Department, in cooperation with the water supplier, to issue a report, as specified, after significant fire damage within a service area, as specified.

6) SB 1088 (Alvarado-Gil, 2024). Would have established the Rural Water Infrastructure for Community Wildfire Protection Program within Cal OES for the distribution of state matching funds to communities within the Wildland Urban Interface in designated high fire hazard severity zones or very high fire hazard severity zones to improve water system infrastructure, as prescribed. This bill, which was similar to AB 372, was held on the suspense file of the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

7) SB 1014 (Dodd, 2024). Would have required the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation to prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, a Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast, and a Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios Report, as specified. This bill was held on the suspense file of the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

8) SB 470 (Alvarado-Gil, 2024). Would have codified the Urban Water Community Drought Relief program and the Small Community Drought Relief program at the Department of Water Resources and would have authorized the program, upon appropriation, to fund projects that provide benefits in addition to drought relief, including projects that reduce the

risk of wildfires for communities through water delivery system improvements for fire suppression purposes in high- and very high-fire hazard severity zones, as specified. This bill was vetoed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Triple referral: This measure was originally triple referred to the Assembly Committees on Emergency Management; Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials; and, Judiciary. It passed the Emergency Management Committee on June 16, 2026, on a 6 – 0 vote. Considering recent amendments and the triple referral of the measure, the Judiciary Committee waived their hearing on the measure to facilitate hearing logistics. Therefore, should this bill be approved by the Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee, it will be referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA- sponsor)
Bella Vista Water District
Calaveras County Water District
California American Water
California Association of Mutual Water Companies
California Chamber of Commerce
California Council for Environmental & Economic Balance (CCEEB)
California Fire Chiefs Association
California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA)
California Special Districts Association
California Water Association
California Water Service
California-Nevada Section, American Water Works Association
Calleguas Municipal Water District
Camrosa Water District
Casitas Municipal Water District
Castroville Community Services District
Central Basin Water Association
City of Tracy
Clearlake Oaks County Water District
Coastside County Water District
Contra Costa Water District
Crescenta Valley Water District
Crestline-Lake Arrowhead Water Agency
Cucamonga Valley Water District
El Dorado Irrigation District
El Dorado Water Agency
El Toro Water District
Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District
Fire Districts Association of California
Foothill Municipal Water District
Georgetown Divide Public Utility District
Hidden Valley Lake Community Services District

Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District
Irvine Ranch Water District
Jurupa Community Services District
Kinneloa Irrigation District
La Habra Heights County Water District
Laguna Beach County Water District
Las Virgenes Municipal Water District
Mammoth Community Water District
Marin Water
McKinleyville Community Services District
Mesa Water District
Mid-Peninsula Water District
Mountain Counties Water Resources Association
North Marin Water District
Olivenhain Municipal Water District
Orange County Water District
Otay Water District
Padre Dam Municipal Water District
Palmdale Water District
Paradise Irrigation District
Pinyon Pines County Water District
Placer County Water Agency
Rancho California Water District
Regional Water Authority
Rincon Del Diablo Municipal Water District
Rowland Water District
Sacramento Suburban Water District
San Benito County Water District
San Diego County Water Authority
San Gabriel Valley Water Association
San Jose Water Company
San Juan Water District
Santa Clara Valley Water District
Santa Fe Irrigation District
Santa Margarita Water District
Sonoma Water
Southern California Water Coalition
Stockton East Water District
Suburban Water Systems
Three Valleys Municipal Water District
Trabuco Canyon Water District
Tri-County Water Authority
Union Public Utility District
Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District
Valley Center Municipal Water District
Valley Water
Vista Irrigation District
Walnut Valley Water District
West Valley Water District

Western Municipal Water District

Opposition

None on file.

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