

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1153 (Caballero) – As Amended June 22, 2026

Policy Committee:	Emergency Management	Vote:	6 - 0
	Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials		6 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires an urban retail water supplier serving a high or very high fire hazard severity zone (FHSZ) to include wildfire response procedures in the supplier's disaster preparedness plan.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires, beginning January 1, 2028, an urban retail water supplier serving a high or very high FHSZ to include certain incident-specific response procedures to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a wildfire in the supplier's disaster preparedness plan, such as an assessment of the resilience of critical infrastructure that includes an evaluation of fire hardening measures and alternative emergency power.
- 2) Requires the supplier to review its disaster preparedness plans at least once every five years and update the plans as necessary and provide the incident-specific response procedures to the county office of emergency services (OES), subject to confidentiality provisions.
- 3) Provides that nothing be interpreted to impose a duty on a public water system to maintain a water system for wildfire defense or suppression, and that neither the failure of a supplier to implement an incident-specific response procedure nor the inability of a public water system to maintain water supply or pressure during a wildfire be considered a substantial cause of damages from a wildfire, although a public water system may be liable for injury or damage resulting from a negligent act or omission.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount, across publicly owned urban retail water suppliers in qualifying FHSZs to plan for additional disaster response procedures, review the plan every five years, and share the procedures with county OES, which the state would not need to reimburse because this bill's requirements for local agencies equally apply to privately owned water suppliers.
- 2) Minor and absorbable costs to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to coordinate any subsequent updates or reviews of county emergency plans.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

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.

This bill is sponsored by the Association of California Water Agencies and supported by other water and utility associations, individual water agencies and districts, and local government entities.

- 2) **Disaster Preparedness of Water Systems.** Existing state law requires a public water system with 10,000 or more service connections to review and revise the system's disaster preparedness plan in conjunction with local fire departments, CalOES, and other agencies to ensure the plan addresses possible disaster scenarios, such as whether the system has sufficient water reserve levels and alternative emergency power. AB 1650 (Portantino), Chapter 472, Statutes of 2012, requires a water company regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission to also develop and adopt an emergency and disaster preparedness plan. Additionally, existing federal law requires a community water system serving more than 3,300 people to develop and update risk and resilience assessments and emergency response plans every five years, with certification by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

This bill expands upon existing federal and state requirements by requiring an urban retail water supplier serving a high or very high FHSZ to include certain wildfire response procedures in the supplier's disaster preparedness plan, which must be reviewed every five years and shared with county OES. This bill also clarifies that a public water system does not have an affirmative duty to stop wildfires. The Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee's analysis of this bill cites that no published case or statutory law imposes such a duty, but water agencies presumably fear that this bill's requirement for a water supplier to develop wildfire response procedures may be interpreted accordingly.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 367 (Bennett), Chapter 690, Statutes of 2025, beginning July 1, 2030, requires a water supplier in Ventura County to have access to sufficient backup energy sources to operate critical fire suppression infrastructure to supply water for at least 24 hours in high or very high FHSZs.

AB 1873 (Bennett) revises the criteria established by AB 367 for a backup energy source to operate critical fire suppression infrastructure used by a water supplier in Ventura County. AB 1873 is pending hearing by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2013 (Bennett) requires certain community water systems located in a high or very high FHSZ to include an annex to the system's disaster preparedness plan that includes information regarding system preparedness and resiliency during a wildfire. AB 2013 failed passage in the Assembly Emergency Management Committee.