

**JOINT INFORMATIONAL HEARING
SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE
AND
JOINT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

California's Mutual Aid System

**Tuesday, February 27, 2018
9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 4203**

Background Paper

California's Mutual Aid System

For over 60 years, state and local jurisdictions in California have partnered together via California's mutual aid system to form an "all-hazards" network of personnel and equipment capable of responding to local emergencies and major disasters anywhere in the state. This extension of the concept of "neighbor helping neighbor" allows for the systematic mobilization, organization, and operation of police, fire, and rescue resources statewide whenever the response needs of an incident or emergency exceed available local resources. No community in California has sufficient resources to cope with every potential emergency it may encounter. By agreeing to assist one another during an emergency, the mutual aid system ensures that every jurisdiction will have sufficient resources to combat an emergency during its time of need.

California's mutual aid system is premised on the voluntary provision of aid between cities, counties, special districts, local, and state agencies. In general, jurisdictions within the mutual aid system are expected to reasonably exhaust their local resources before calling for outside assistance, as well as render the maximum practicable assistance to all emergency-stricken communities requesting mutual aid. Reimbursement is typically not granted to jurisdictions providing mutual aid resources to others unless the circumstances prompting the need for aid are covered under a separate financial aid arrangement, such as a Fire Management Assistance Grant, or fall within the reimbursement provisions of the California Disaster Assistance Act or the federal Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) administers several elements of the state's mutual aid system, including

maintaining an updated inventory of mutual aid resources located within the state, developing statewide fire and law enforcement mutual aid plans, pre-positioning aid equipment – such as fire engines – at local jurisdictions, and, when applicable, assisting state and local jurisdictions process reimbursement claims for aid rendered.

The mutual aid system operates on an incremental and progressive system of mobilization when a local jurisdiction issues the call for outside assistance. Within any particular area, adjacent or neighboring agencies are the first to assist each other, either pursuant to a local mutual aid agreement or pursuant to one of the state's regional or statewide mutual aid plans. Should an emergency require additional assistance from outside the immediate area, a call for additional aid first goes out at a county-wide level, and then to pre-defined mutual aid regions and their regional coordinators (California has six statewide regions for fire and rescue aid and seven regions for law enforcement aid). If the combined mutual aid resources of a region are inadequate to cope with a particular incident, the regional mutual aid coordinator requests additional resources from across the state through one of the state mutual aid coordinators at Cal OES. Importantly, the responsible local official in whose jurisdiction an incident requiring mutual aid occurs, remains in charge of responding to the incident, which includes directing personnel and equipment provided through the mutual aid system.

California's mutual aid system has been used to successfully respond to countless incidents and emergencies over the past half-century, including mitigating the impacts of catastrophic earthquakes, restoring order during periods of civil unrest, and combatting multiple uncontrolled wildland fires.

In addition to the intrastate mutual aid system, California's emergency managers can request mutual aid resources from other states when needed through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). EMAC is an interstate compact, ratified by Congress, which allows states impacted by a disaster to request and receive assistance from other member states quickly and efficiently. Adopted by all 50 states, as well as the six U.S. territories, EMAC helps facilitate the provision of emergency personnel and equipment to respond to any emergency or disaster, whether natural or man-made. Unlike California's intrastate mutual aid system, aid provided through EMAC by an assisting state is typically subject to reimbursement according to predetermined cost schedules.

Each year, California sends resources, such as firefighting equipment, rescue aircraft, search teams, emergency managers, and other specialized personnel and

equipment to assist other states during disasters. Similarly, California has received emergency assistance from other states through EMAC in response to earthquakes and firestorms. For example, when southern California experienced catastrophic wildfires in 2007, the state requested EMAC assistance and a total of 43 states sent aid to California, which included more than 27,000 out-of-state firefighters who provided firefighting and prevention efforts. In 2017 during the Thomas Fire, 8,700 firefighters from 21 states responded to California's call for assistance. Without the aid provided by EMAC, California would not have been able to fight these large firestorms effectively.

2017 Fire Season

California's 2017 fire season was unprecedented, both in terms of scope and destruction. The State faced roughly 9,000 wildfires which burned over one million acres. In addition, wildfires destroyed nearly 11,000 structures and were responsible for the deaths of at least 46 people. The fire season was so destructive, that five of California's most destructive wildfires in its recorded history occurred in 2017.

The worst of these wildfires, in terms of damage, were the numerous wildfires that ripped throughout Northern California in October. Sometimes referred collectively as the North Bay Fires, the Nuns, Tubbs, Atlas, and Redwood Valley Fires, were responsible for the destruction of approximately 9,000 structures, and the unfortunate death of more than 40 individuals.

Unfortunately, that was not the end. While December is seen as being outside of California's fire season, December 2017 was the scene to California's largest wildfire in recorded history. Known as the Thomas Fire, the fire burned approximately 280,000 acres, destroyed more than 1,000 structures, and took the lives of two people.

As climate change continues to plague the state, many scientists have predicted that the 2017 fire season is not an anomaly and that similar wildfires are likely to continue in the future.

Scope of the hearing

While California's mutual aid system is world renowned, the recent wildfires demonstrate that California's mutual aid system might be strained. As wildfires continue to expand both in their scope and destruction, California's mutual aid

system must expand and change to be better able to protect California and its residents. This hearing will bring together state officials from Cal OES, CAL FIRE, and fire chiefs throughout the State to discuss California's mutual aid system, the 2017 fire season, and most importantly, the improvements the State can make to continue to make California's mutual aid system the envy of the world.