

CAL FIRE

Cooperative Fire Protection

In a state as vast, diverse, and densely populated as California, no single emergency response agency can effectively manage every incident on its own. For this reason, cooperative efforts—formalized through contracts, agreements, and mutual aid systems—are essential to ensuring a rapid, coordinated, and effective response to a wide range of emergencies. These include wildland and structure fires, floods, earthquakes, hazardous materials incidents, and medical emergencies.

CAL FIRE's Cooperative Fire Protection Program plays a central role in facilitating and managing these critical partnerships. The program's staff are responsible for negotiating, maintaining, and administering agreements with a wide range of partners, including:

- Local government fire departments and special districts
- Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management
- Other state agencies and departments
- International wildfire agencies and emergency management organizations


These agreements enable seamless collaboration and resource sharing across jurisdictions. As a result, it's common to see fire engines and personnel from multiple agencies working side by side at the scene of a major incident. Through a Unified Command structure, these teams operate under a shared set of objectives, communication protocols, and resource management systems—regardless of agency affiliation.

This integrated, multi-agency approach maximizes efficiency, reduces duplication of effort, and enhances public and firefighter safety. It exemplifies California's commitment to collaborative emergency response and highlights the importance of partnerships in protecting lives, property, and natural resources statewide.

State

Under the framework of the California Master Mutual Aid Agreement, CAL FIRE plays a vital role in supporting other fire departments across the state whenever its resources are available—regardless of the type of emergency. This mutual aid system ensures a coordinated response to all-hazard incidents, including structure fires, hazardous materials incidents, medical emergencies, and natural disasters.





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In return, CAL FIRE can also request assistance from local government fire departments during significant wildland fire events. This reciprocal support enables a unified, rapid deployment of personnel and equipment statewide, enhancing California's ability to respond to major emergencies.

In addition to fire-related incidents, CAL FIRE may be mobilized to assist with non-fire emergencies at the request of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), particularly when a State of Emergency has been declared. Notable examples include:

- The 1994 Northridge Earthquake, where CAL FIRE provided incident management, search and rescue support, and logistical assistance
- The statewide flooding events of 1997 and 2023, during which CAL FIRE deployed flood-fighting crews, heavy equipment, and coordination teams to assist in response and recovery operations

When wildfires escalate and state resources become heavily strained, CAL FIRE also draws support from the California Military Department under pre-established agreements. This includes activation of California National Guard personnel and equipment, such as:

- C-130 aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) for aerial retardant drops
- Helicopters for reconnaissance, water drops, and crew transport
- Support personnel, including hand crews and incident management staff
- Mobile communications systems and other specialized emergency response resources

Together, these partnerships form the backbone of California's comprehensive emergency response system, ensuring a coordinated, scalable, and flexible approach to managing disasters of any size or complexity.

Federal

One of the largest and most critical cooperative programs operated by CAL FIRE is its interagency fire protection agreement with federal wildland fire management agencies. These partners include the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Department of Defense.



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The primary goal of this agreement is to ensure that the closest available agency responds to a wildfire, regardless of land ownership or jurisdiction. This concept, often referred to as "Closest Resource Concept" or "boundary-less response," allows for faster and more efficient initial attack on wildfires, improving outcomes and reducing overall suppression costs.

Through this robust partnership, CAL FIRE and its federal counterparts can leverage personnel, equipment, aircraft, and incident management teams across jurisdictional boundaries. In times of major disaster or when CAL FIRE's resources are heavily committed within California, the state can draw on federal and state resources from across the United States for support.

Conversely, CAL FIRE provides assistance to other states and federal agencies under interstate compacts and mutual aid agreements, deploying crews, engines, overhead staff, and specialized resources to incidents nationwide. These collaborative efforts ensure that California is both a recipient and a provider of critical fire response support during periods of heightened wildfire activity.

This integrated system of cooperation not only improves operational efficiency but also strengthens national wildfire readiness and resilience in the face of increasingly severe and frequent fire events.

International

In support of its mission to protect lives, property, and natural resources, CAL FIRE's International Program fosters strategic partnerships with global firefighting and emergency management agencies. These relationships are formalized through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and other cooperative agreements that promote international collaboration in wildfire prevention, response, and recovery.

Through these agreements, CAL FIRE and its international partners engage in the exchange of technical expertise, training programs, and operational best practices. Key areas of collaboration include:

- Aviation-based wildfire suppression techniques
- Communication strategies and incident command coordination
- Fuels management and vegetation treatment
- Prescribed burning and pre-fire planning
- Advanced data analysis and decision-support tools
- Wildfire policy development and legislative insights



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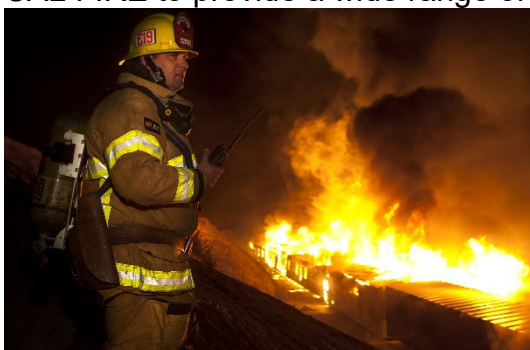


These international partnerships also focus on emerging challenges driven by climate change, such as longer fire seasons, increased fire intensity, and shifting ecological conditions. By working together, agencies are able to strengthen wildfire resilience at both community and ecosystem levels, while improving global readiness and capacity to manage increasingly complex fire environments.

Through its International Program, CAL FIRE plays an active role in shaping the global wildfire management landscape—promoting innovation, mutual learning, and a shared commitment to public and environmental safety.

Local Government

Since the early 1900s, local government entities—including cities, counties, and special districts—have partnered with CAL FIRE through Local Government Agreements. These agreements enable CAL FIRE to provide a wide range of emergency services to communities throughout California.



Under these cooperative arrangements, CAL FIRE delivers full-service fire protection to many areas, particularly in privately owned wildland regions, helping to safeguard both rural and urban populations. In addition to wildland fire suppression, CAL FIRE administers over 100 cooperative fire protection agreements statewide. These agreements extend CAL FIRE's services to numerous local agencies, offering professional fire protection and emergency response capabilities tailored to local needs.

As a comprehensive, all-risk emergency response agency, CAL FIRE is equipped to respond to:

- Wildland and structure fires
- Medical emergencies
- Floods and mudslides
- Hazardous materials incidents
- Swift water rescues
- Earthquakes and other natural disasters
- Civil disturbances and other public safety threats

Local governments benefit from CAL FIRE's extensive experience, specialized training, and statewide resources, which they can access through contracts and agreements. This collaborative model enhances public safety by delivering consistent, high-quality emergency services while allowing local jurisdictions to maintain cost-effective fire protection solutions.

Contract Counties

CAL FIRE (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) is responsible for providing fire protection services within designated State Responsibility Areas (SRA)—lands where the state has primary financial responsibility for wildland fire protection. These areas cover more than 31 million acres and are located in 56 of California's 58 counties.

In most of these counties, CAL FIRE directly provides fire protection services. However, in six counties—Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Santa Barbara, and Ventura—fire protection responsibilities within the SRA are managed by the counties themselves under formal agreements with CAL FIRE. These counties are commonly referred to as "Contract Counties." Together, they are responsible for protecting approximately 3.4 million acres of SRA land.

To support these counties, CAL FIRE provides funding for a wide range of fire protection services and infrastructure. This includes:



- Salaries and wages for fire suppression personnel
- Maintenance and operation of firefighting facilities and equipment
- Fire prevention programs and staffing
- Pre-fire planning and management positions
- Emergency communications and dispatch services
- Special equipment repairs and upgrades
- Administrative support
- Infrastructure improvements, such as new fire stations and facility upgrades

These partnerships allow CAL FIRE to maintain consistent and effective fire protection across a vast and diverse landscape, while leveraging the local knowledge and resources of county fire agencies.