

What is CAL FIRE?

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection serves and safeguards the people and protects the property and resources of California

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is an emergency response and resource protection department. CAL FIRE protects lives, property and natural resources from fire; responds to emergencies o all types; and protects and preserves timberlands, wildlands, and urban forests. The department's various programs work together using ongoing assessments of the condition of natural resources, while considering the challenges of a increasing population, to plan protection strategies for California. Department personnel and equipment are a familiar sight throughout the state with responsibility for protecting more than 31 million acres of California's privately owned wildlands and providing emergency services across the state to local government cooperators through agreements with districts, cities, and counties.

Fire and Emergency Response

Each year, CAL FIRE responds to thousands of wildland fires that burn an average of a million acres. In addition, CAL FIRE personnel answer the call year-round for other emergencies including structure fires, automobile accidents, medical aids, swift water rescues, civil disturbances, search and rescue operations, hazardous material spills, train wrecks, floods, and earthquakes. Because of CAL FIRE's size and major incident command experience, the departme is often asked to assist or take the lead in other major disasters, including: the 2018 Camp Fire in Butte County, the fire siege and COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, the Tulare Flooding of 2023, the Southern California fire siege in January 2025, and in 2026 supported several Western US states with wildfire and flooding coordination and response.

The Best Personnel and Equipment

CAL FIRE covers the state with numerous resources, including operational units, fire stations, conservation camps, an air attack and helitack bases. The heart of CAL FIRE's emergency response and resource protection capability is a forc of full-time fire professionals, foresters, and administrative employees; seasonal firefighters; local government volunteer firefighters; Volunteers in Prevention; hand crews; and fuels reduction crews. To transport and support these forces, CAL FIRE operates a multitude of fire engines, rescue squads, paramedic units, aerial ladder trucks, bulldozers, mobile communication centers, and mobile kitchen units. The department funds, via contract, additional engines and bulldozers in Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. From the air, CAL FIRE operates 1,200-gallon and 4,000-gallon airtankers, rescue/water-dropping helicopters, and air tactical planes.

Cooperation Between Agencies

In a state as large and populated as California, cooperative efforts via contracts and agreements between state, local federal, international, and tribal agencies are essential to respond to emergencies like wildland and structure fires, floods, earthquakes, hazardous material spills, medical aids, and even terrorist attacks. Because of these cooperative efforts, resources from many different agencies may respond to the scene of an emergency.

Enforcing the Laws

To enforce state fire and forest laws, CAL FIRE investigators determine fire origin and cause, interview witnesses, issue citations and set up surveillance operations. CAL FIRE - Office of the State Fire Marshal Arson and Bomb Investigators and Deputy State Fire Marshals provide services to state-owned facilities, as well as local government fire and law enforcement agencies.



Training

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), State Fire Training, and CAL FIRE Training Centers Program provide training education and certification programs to the California fire service. Through practical training exercises and classroom courses, every California firefighter is offered training standards that have been approved by OSFM. State Fire Training programs are offered annually and provide certifications to members of California fire departments, statewide. Additionally, each year CAL FIRE personnel attend training at the CAL FIRE Training Centers in Ione, Riverside, Redding, and Atwater, participating in classes ranging from firefighter academy to forest practice enforcement. State Fire Training is internationally accredited by the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress and the Pro Board (IFSAC/Pro Board).

Office of the State Fire Marshal

Part of the CAL FIRE team since 1995, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) supports the protection of life and property through engineering, enforcement, and education. OSFM provides for fire safety where people live, work and congregate. Deputy State Fire Marshals enforce fire-related laws and codes in state-owned or operated buildings, adopt minimum building and fire safety regulations for use in all occupancies throughout the state, oversee the California fire service training and certification system, license those who inspect and service fire extinguishers, regulate the use of flame retardants, evaluate building materials against fire safety standards, approve fireworks devices, license pyrotechnicians, operate the National Emergency Response Information System (NERIS), regulate hazardous liquid pipelines throughout the state, investigate fires and explosions, and assist local fire departments with regulation interpretation and licensing investigations. The Planning and Risk Analysis Program within OSFM oversees the California Fire Plan, and Community Wildfire Preparedness & Mitigation.

Prevention and Planning

A large part of CAL FIRE's mission is in prevention. The Unit Fire Prevention Bureaus consist of multiple programs including fire engineering, vegetation management, fire planning, education, and law enforcement. Common projects include fire break construction and other fire fuels reduction activities that lessen the risk of wildfire to communities and evacuation routes. Other activities include defensible space inspections, emergency evacuation planning, community risk reduction, fire prevention education in schools, fire hazard severity mapping, implementation of the state and unit fire plans, and fire-related law enforcement activities like arson investigation.

Resource Management and Forestry

CAL FIRE's mission emphasizes the management and protection of California's natural resources. This part of the mission is accomplished through ongoing assessment and study of the state's natural resources and the use of a variety of resource management programs, including the Fire and Resource Assessment Program.

Managing Timber and Fuels

CAL FIRE oversees enforcement of California's forest practice regulations, which guide timber harvesting on state and private lands. As part of this program, department foresters review Timber Harvesting Plans (THPs), which are submitted by timber landowners who want to harvest trees. The reviews and inspections ensure protection of watershed and wildlife as well as renewal of timber resources. Department foresters and fire personnel work closely to encourage and implement fuels management projects to reduce the threat of uncontrolled wildfires. Vegetation management projects take teamwork between foresters, firefighters, landowners, tribal agencies, and local communities. CAL FIRE also manages 14 Demonstration State Forests that provide commercial timber production, public recreation, forest research, and demonstration of good forest management practices.