



NEWS



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- Firefighters and Fire Chiefs rally to protect communities and fight for expanded mutual aid funding

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[Submitted Photos]

Sacramento, CA — Fire Chiefs and firefighters — representing tens of thousands of firefighters from every corner of California — joined local elected officials, community leaders and lawmakers today to call on the Legislature and Governor to increase funding to protect our communities from the rising threats of natural disasters in “California’s New Normal.” This desperately needed funding would be invested in California’s severely strained firefighting mutual aid and dispatch systems for both local fire departments and CalFire.

The unprecedented coalition was represented by the California Professional Firefighters, CalFire firefighters Local 2881, California Fire Chiefs, California Fire Districts Association, California State Firefighters’ Association, California League of Cities, Rural County Representatives of California and the California Special Districts Association.

Brief breakdown of the two funding requests which will modernize California’s firefighting service to combat our new normal. This investment will save lives in every corner of the Golden State:

- \$100 million for pre-positioning fire resources in high-risk areas prior to the onset of extreme weather conditions, and improved communications technologies to allow more efficient and effective resource deployment.
- \$84 million to purchase 31 CalFire engines — that were cut from the state budget back in 1975 — and to hire the skilled and trained personnel to staff the emergency response rigs. There are fewer CalFire engines in the field now compared to the mid-seventies.

Quotes:

Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief for **San Bernardino County Fire** and president of the California Fire Chiefs Association: “Our Mutual Aid resources are overstressed. In the last six years, the number of annual requests for assistance that go ‘unfilled’ has skyrocketed from 300 to 11,000 — 30 percent of all requests. We need to strengthen and modernize our Mutual Aid System into a proactive system that can fight fires and other disasters in the first hour by pre-positioning firefighters and equipment where high risks are predicted.”

Cliff Allen, President of Cal Fire Local 2881: “CalFire appreciates Senator McGuire bringing together firefighters from throughout the state to work collaboratively on planning for disasters in this New Normal.”

Brian Rice, President of California Professional Firefighters: “Whether it’s catastrophic fire or other disasters, we know that getting mutual aid resources in place ahead of time can save lives and property,” said. “Hundreds, maybe thousands of lives were saved during the Montecito debris flow because our USAR resources were in position before the massive rains hit. California needs to make a commitment to a modern mutual aid response system to meet the changing threat we face.”

Steven Hall, Fire Chief for the Central Fire Protection District of Santa Cruz County and president of the Fire Districts Association of California: “Especially for California’s smaller and more isolated communities where help is not nearby, we need ways to accelerate our response to fast-moving disasters. This funding will enable us to take full advantage of predictive analysis tools, streamline the ordering of mutual aid resources, and pre-position firefighting personnel to better protect our communities.”

Neil McCormick, CEO, California Special District Association: “The California Special Districts Association is a proud member of the Disaster Readiness for Safer Communities (D-RiSC) coalition requesting additional funding to pre-position local firefighters and equipment where fire threat risks are high. Fire protection districts, community services districts, and other local agencies throughout California work hard to keep our communities safe. Including additional funding in the budget is vital for their continued success as California adjusts to the new normal, increased wildfire activity throughout the year.”

Santa Rosa Mayor Chris Coursey: “Through California’s Mutual Aid System — where neighbor helps neighbor in times of disaster — firefighters and strike teams from across the state helped our city fight the Tubbs Fire, and at one point, we had 7,000 fire fighters at our camp grounds. As good as our Mutual Aid System is in California, it isn’t as proactive, nimble and robust as it needs to be in this day of ferocious, wind-driven fires. In fact, it took many hours and even days for the full force of Mutual Aid help to reach Santa Rosa as our city burned.”

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