



## **FACT SHEET**

### **Budget Augmentation Request of \$100 Million For Expanding Mutual Aid System**

A coalition of California's fire service – including fire chiefs and firefighters at the local and state level – is requesting a \$100 million augmentation to the FY 2018-19 State Budget to enable the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) to accomplish the following goals:

- Reimburse local governments for the cost of pre-positioning firefighters and equipment in advance of identifiable risks under the California Mutual Aid System
- Upgrade emergency communications and resource dispatching capabilities

In 2017, California saw the largest, most destructive and costliest wildfires in the state's history. They were caused by extreme weather conditions attributable to climate change. As the threat of catastrophic wildfires becomes more severe, the ability to have firefighters, apparatus and equipment available and ready to respond immediately to fire threats is essential to preventing the loss of life and property.

The state budget proposal to spend an additional \$100 million for disaster readiness is supported by recommendations made in 2003 by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission, which was convened in the wake of major wildfires in San Diego, to enhance local firefighting capabilities. Their recommendations have been updated several times since then, but they have consistently included proposals to modernize the Mutual Aid System, giving OES and local governments the resources and capability needed to enable first responders to aggressively attack emerging fires and other threats in the first minutes and hours of their destructive paths.

California's Mutual Aid System was created in 1950 to allow local fire agencies to come to the aid of surrounding jurisdictions when fires and other disaster threats are too large for local resources to handle effectively. The system, managed by OES and cited as a national model, has proven to be an effective and efficient means of fighting fires and responding to other large-scale disasters. But it was designed primarily as a reactive response to disasters. This proposed budget augmentation would expand the system's capabilities to be proactive as well.

The mega fires of 2017 brought to light the need for more resources in the face of more extreme weather conditions. More than 35,600 mutual aid requests were made last year, of which 11,000 (31 percent) went unfilled. The Mutual Aid System, as effective as it has been, needs to be proactive as well as reactive. Instead of waiting for an incident to occur and then organizing resources, changing conditions mandate that firefighting resources be placed on standby where and when weather conditions pose the greatest risks of fire and other natural disasters. This policy solution is called "pre-positioning."

Pre-positioning provides the best – and in many instances the only – means of attacking fires with enough equipment and staffing in the initial minutes and hours necessary to prevent them from spreading and becoming catastrophic events.

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It is important to note two facts:

- Local governments may be reimbursed by the state and federal government for responding to major events. Approximately 80 percent of the resources deployed for disaster response are provided by local government fire agencies.
- In September 2017, \$25 million was appropriated for OES to reimburse local government fire agencies to assist surrounding fire departments for pre-positioning under the Mutual Aid System. By this spring, a mechanism is expected to be in place for the first time to reimburse local governments for pre-positioning.

Gov. Brown has proposed another \$25 million effective July 1, 2018 for the purchase of 106 fire engines identified as a critical need by OES, including \$1.4 million for fleet maintenance and staff support. These engines will meet a critical need, considering the fact that 55 percent of mutual aid request for engines went unfilled last year.

**FY 2018-2019 budget request:**

- \$87 million would reimburse local governments for costs to pre-position resources in high-risk areas prior to the onset of extreme weather conditions (wind, heavy rain and “red flag” fire conditions). These funds would allow for additional strike teams to quickly attack fires in high-risk areas to prevent them from becoming catastrophic fires. Strike teams are comprised of five (5) engines, 20 firefighters and one (1) strike team leader. Mobilizing a strike team costs local governments approximately \$50,000 per day.
- \$13 million would pay for improved communications technologies to allow more efficient and effective resource deployment.
  - Local government engines would be equipped with a GPS-linked communications system called Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL), a system already being installed in state-owned equipment operated by both OES and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Use of the AVL system ensures the efficient mutual aid dispatching of strike teams closest to a disaster.
  - The Resource Ordering and Status System would be replaced with a state-of-the-art system for requesting and managing resources for these large-scale emergencies.
  - Funds would be available to bring in additional OES and local government personnel to staff regional dispatch centers.

Funds would go toward improved technologies for alerting individuals and communities of approaching threats.