

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 1003 (Calderon) – As Amended April 23, 2025

SUBJECT: Public health: emergency plans and wildfire research

SUMMARY: Requires the State Department of Public (DPH) to complete a plan with recommendations and guidelines for counties to use in case of a significant air quality event, county-specific plans, and DPH to convene a wildfire smoke mitigation task force to research specified topics and recommend best practices to minimize public health impacts of wildfire smoke. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires DPH's significant air quality event plan to be completed on or before June 30, 2026, posted on DPH's internet website within seven days of completion, and distributed within 14 days of completion to specified local and state entities and officers, including:
 - (a) The chair of the board of supervisors and chief executive of each county, including a city and county;
 - (b) The director of the public health department for each county, including a city and county;
 - (c) The director of the office of emergency services for each county, including a city and county;
 - (d) The Director of Emergency Services;
 - (e) The chair of the Assembly Committee on Health and the chair of the Senate Committee on Health;
 - (f) The air pollution control officer for each air district; and,
 - (g) Stakeholders.
- 2) Require the county-specific significant air quality plan to incorporate a process to conduct outreach and communicate to the public and with key stakeholders information about the plan, including what it includes, how it will be implemented, and steps stakeholders and other members of the public need to take to be prepared in the event of an air quality event caused by wildfires or other sources.
- 3) Requires, after a county-specific plan or a regional multicounty plan is approved by the county's board of supervisors, a copy of the plan to be distributed to all of the following:
 - (a) The chief executive, who may be a city manager or a mayor of each city within the county, and the county executive of the respective county, including a city and county;
 - (b) The director of the county's department of public health and the director of the department of public health for any city in their county that has its own public health department;
 - (c) The State Public Health Officer; and,
 - (d) The Director of Emergency Services.
- 4) Requires DPH to post a copy of each county-specific plan or regional multicounty plan after a plan is adopted by each county within 14 days of receiving each plan.
- 5) Requires DPH to appoint and convene a wildfire smoke mitigation task force to research and recommend best practices to minimize public health impacts of wildfire smoke.

- 6) Requires the task force to include representatives with experience in wildfire response, air quality, public health, emergency response, and other relevant fields. Authorizes the task force to include, but not be limited to, representatives from any of the following:
 - (a) The Office of Emergency Services;
 - (b) The State Air Resources Board;
 - (c) The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment;
 - (d) The California Department of Aging;
 - (e) The State Department of Developmental Services;
 - (f) Hospitals;
 - (g) Medical professionals focused on respiratory health, pulmonology, pediatrics, or emergency medicine;
 - (h) Local air districts;
 - (i) Local government;
 - (j) Business organizations, including local and state chambers of commerce;
 - (k) Nonprofit organizations specializing in any of the following:
 - i) Respiratory health;
 - ii) Seniors;
 - iii) Individuals with disabilities; and,
 - iv) Individuals experiencing homelessness;
- 7) Requires the task force to consider, but not be limited to, all of the following topics:
 - (a) The impact of current programs or efforts to protect public health from the impact of smoke before, during, and after significant air quality events caused by wildfires or other sources;
 - (b) Prevention, mitigation, and other practices that a state agency, air district, or county can take to protect public health from the impact of smoke from future significant air quality events caused by wildfires or other sources;
 - (c) Public outreach strategies that exist, or should exist, to educate, inform, and share information with first responders and the public about available resources and useful strategies to protect a person's health in the event of an air quality event;
 - (d) Multiagency coordination between state, local, and regional government agencies and departments; and
 - (e) Possible funding sources for wildfire smoke mitigation.
- 8) Requires the task force to report its recommendations to the Legislature and the relevant policy committees on or before January 1, 2028.
- 9) Requires DPH to publish the task force's recommendations on its internet website.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes DPH to protect the public's health and helps shape positive health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Specifies its functions to include infectious disease control and prevention, food safety, environmental health, laboratory services, patient safety, emergency preparedness, chronic disease prevention and health promotion, family health, health equity and vital records and statistics. (Health and Safety Code Sections 104100-104323)

- 2) Requires the governing body of each political subdivision of the state to carry out the provisions of the State Emergency Plan. (Government Code Section 8568)
- 3) Requires DPH to develop a plan with recommendations and guidelines for counties to use in the case of a significant air quality event caused by wildfires or other sources and requires the plan to address, among other things, provision and distribution of respiratory protection equipment and devices, providing information to the public and developing prevention strategies to protect residents from unhealthy air. (Health and Safety Code Section 107250)
- 4) Requires the recommendations in the plan to include guidance about how a county, including a city and county, informs its residents of unhealthy air quality, the Air Quality Index, how and when to use respiratory protection, best practices and recommended protocols, and how to protect vulnerable residents, as specified. (Health and Safety Code Section 107250)
- 5) Requires the plan to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including, but not limited to, representatives of all of the following:
 - (a) Governor's Office of Emergency Services;
 - (b) State Air Resources Board;
 - (c) Governor's Office of Planning and Research;
 - (d) California Department of Aging;
 - (e) State Department of Developmental Services;
 - (f) Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment;
 - (g) Medical professionals focused on respiratory health, pulmonology, pediatrics, and emergency medicine;
 - (h) Small and large air pollution districts;
 - (i) Counties;
 - (j) Cities;
 - (k) Hospitals;
 - (l) Business organizations;
 - (m) Nonprofit organizations involved in respiratory health;
 - (n) Nonprofit organizations working on behalf of issues for individuals with disabilities;
 - (o) Nonprofit organizations working on behalf of issues for the homeless; and,
 - (p) Nonprofit organizations working on behalf of issues for seniors. (Health and Safety Code Section 107250)
- 6) Requires a county (including a city and county) upon the next update to their emergency plan, to integrate access and functional needs into the emergency plan by addressing, at a minimum, how the access and functional needs population is served by emergency communications, evacuation, and sheltering. (Health and Safety Code Section 107250)
- 7) Establishes the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the office of the Governor and makes Cal OES responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or manmade disasters and emergencies. (Government Code Section 8550)
- 8) Authorizes the Governor to proclaim a state of emergency and local officials and local governments to proclaim a local emergency, when specified conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist, and authorizes the Governor or the

appropriate local government to exercise certain powers in response to that emergency. (Government Code Section 8558)

- 9) Defines “state of emergency” and “local emergency” to mean a duly proclaimed existence of conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state or territorial limits of a local government caused by, among other things, a sudden and severe energy shortage. (Government Code Section 8558)
- 10) Requires the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) for managing multiagency and multijurisdictional responses to emergencies in California. State agencies are required to use SEMS and local government entities must use SEMS in order to be eligible for any reimbursement of response-related costs under the state’s disaster assistance programs. (Government Code Section 8607)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author, “Prolonged exposure to wildfire smoke can be harmful to lung health. Research has shown that hospitalizations for adverse smoke exposure increase within a two month period after a wildfire or significant air quality event. Children, people with lung or heart disease, pregnant women, and older adults are particularly vulnerable. In 2018 and following the Camp Fire, 76% of children with asthma in Northern California’s Bay Area suffered an asthma attack or flare-up. AB 1003 builds upon my previous legislation, AB 619 of 2021, establishing a deadline for the state to finish developing recommendations to protect Californians from the detriments of wildfire smoke. This bill also establishes a Wildfire Smoke Research and Education fund, to research the short and long-term health impacts of wildfire smoke on firefighters and residents. As we recover from the 2025 wildfires in Los Angeles County, California must recommit to protecting our health during times of crisis.”

Equity impact: According to the author’s staff, “This bill seeks to address the harmful impacts of wildfire smoke, with the understanding that it has the greatest impact on vulnerable populations. According to the Air Quality Research Center at UC Davis, Wildfire smoke is particularly dangerous to those with preexisting conditions, children, and the elderly. In addition the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notes that those that work outside and are of lower socio-economic status are also particularly vulnerable. These populations are most likely to be communities of color, including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and immigrants.”

Unprecedented Wildfires in California: Wildfires are a severe and growing threat to lives, property, and infrastructure in California. The confluence of a changing climate, urbanization, and constraints on forest management has added urgency to the need to enhance our strategy to address this threat. In Cal FIRE’s 2020 Fire Siege Report, the Director states, “At the end of 2020, we closed the book on, arguably, the worst fire year ever experienced on the west coast, and specifically in California. Since 2015, the term “unprecedented” has been used year over year as conditions have worsened, and the operational reality of a changing climate sets in.

According to data from CAL FIRE, 15 of California's 20 most destructive fires have occurred in the past decade. Collectively, these most recent fires have resulted in 180 deaths and the loss of

57,483 structures (homes, outbuildings, and commercial properties). While fewer wildfires threatened California in 2023 due to the increased number of weather events and atmospheric rivers, the vegetative growth from the significant rainfall contributed to devastating wildfires in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, the Park Fire became the fourth-largest fire in California's history. Despite aggressive initial attack suppression efforts, the fire rapidly expanded, ultimately consuming 429,603 acres across Butte and Tehama counties. The Park Fire led to the destruction of 709 structures and damage to 54 others, prompting widespread evacuations and the temporary closure of Lassen Volcanic National Park. In 2025, Los Angeles County experienced two of the most destructive wildfires in history (discussed below).

As the state continues adapting to climate change, including the increasing likelihood of extreme Fire Weather Index conditions, it will be essential to establish programs and policies that help reduce the risk of loss during a fire.

2025 Los Angeles Fires: In January 2025, Los Angeles County experienced the second and third most destructive fires in California history: the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire. AccuWeather estimates these fires' total damage and economic loss to be between \$250 billion and \$275 billion. At its height, the fires placed an estimated 331,335 people on an evacuation advisory, with nearly 192,000 residents facing mandatory evacuation and roughly 140,000 subject to warnings. The blazes burned a combined 37,469 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

The Eaton Fire became the second most destructive fire in California history after destroying 9,418 buildings, 1,074 structures damaged, and 17 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire is the third most destructive fire in state history, with 6,837 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities.

As firefighters were battling the largest conflagrations, additional fires broke out in the Los Angeles area. Crews were able to stop the forward spread and contain the blazes. These fires included the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst, and Auto fires, which burned close to 2,400 acres between them. Two weeks after the initial fires, the Hughes Fire began near Castaic Lake in northern Los Angeles County on January 22 and grew to over 10,000 acres. Firefighters fully contained the fire on January 30 after covering 10,425 acres.

Wildfire smoke and air quality: Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of air pollutants that can temporarily degrade air quality and harm human health. The chemical composition of smoke depends on various factors, including burn conditions, type of biomass burned, and weather-related influences. Wildfire smoke can temporarily increase ambient levels of particulate matter and other pollutants regulated under the Clean Air Act.

Wildfire response strategies rely on air quality monitoring, smoke forecasting, and timely communication of air quality conditions and related health risks to the public. Various federal, tribal, state, and local agencies contribute to these tasks. To measure ambient air pollutant levels, they rely on established monitors from the national network and deploy temporary monitors. Specialists also use computer modeling to estimate pollution levels.

Arguments in support: Breathe Southern California writes, "As we know so well, California is always at risk of experiencing its next landscape-scale wildfire, and where there's fire, there's smoke. While our state has made strides to improve forest management and significantly reduce

carbon emissions, smoke knows no boundaries and will always impact residents. Wildfire smoke causes problems far beyond the geographic reach of the flames. Emergency room visits spike during smoke events, and people with respiratory diseases are more likely to experience flare-ups. Children face long-term lung damage if they are exposed to smoke too frequently, and these smoke events also put a massive strain on hospital resources. The passage of AB 1003 would expedite the implementation of AB 619 (Calderon, Ch. 412, 2021), which would have had made a positive public health impact when dealing with the smoke from our state's recent wildfires."

The California Association of Environmental Health Administrators writes, "Wildfires are fueling a public health crisis, with impacts to air quality, the health care system, and mental health. Climate models predict wildfires will further triple in frequency and severity by 2050. Children, the elderly, the disabled, pregnant women, those with chronic health conditions, outdoor workers, firefighters, incarcerated populations, and unhoused populations are the most vulnerable to the ill effects of increases in air pollution."

Related legislation: SB 326 (Becker) would require the Deputy Director of Community Wildfire Preparedness and Mitigation within the Office of the State Fire Marshal in the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to prepare a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Planning Framework, Wildfire Risk Baseline and Forecast, and Wildfire Mitigation Scenarios report, as provided. (Pending in the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water)

Prior legislation: AB 619 (Calderon), Chapter 412, Statutes of 202. Requires DPH to develop a plan with recommendations and guidelines for counties to use in case of a significant air quality event caused by wildfires or other sources. Requires a county, in advance of the next update to its emergency plan, to use the plan developed by DPH but allows a county to incorporate its existing process, as specified.

Double referral: This bill is double-referred. It passed the Assembly Committee on Health on April 8, 2025 with a vote of 15-0.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Breathe Southern California (sponsor)
California Air Pollution Control Officers Association
California Association of Environmental Health Administrators (CAEHA)
California Society for Respiratory Care

Opposition

None on file.

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