

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 1075 (Bryan) – As Amended April 2, 2025

SUBJECT: Fire protection: privately contracted firefighters: public water sources

SUMMARY: This bill prohibits privately contracted firefighters from connecting their equipment to public water sources, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Prohibits privately contracted firefighters from connecting their equipment to public water sources, unless authorized by the Incident Command or authority overseeing an active fire incident.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires Cal OES, in collaboration with CAL FIRE, and the board of directors of the FIREScope Program, to create regulations for how privately hired fire prevention crews can use equipment during an active fire, including
 - a. All equipment shall be clearly labeled nonemergency.
 - b. Privately contracted private fire prevention resource vehicles shall not use emergency lights or sirens.
 - c. Privately contracted private fire prevention resource vehicles shall not have any labeling that indicates emergency personnel or fire department. (HSC § 14868)
- 2) Authorizes Cal OES to consult private fire prevention companies and public fire agencies to develop these regulations. (HSC § 14868)

FISCAL EFFECT: A fiscal committee has not heard this bill.

COMMENTS:

Purpose of this bill: According to the author, “AB 1075 would protect municipal water systems by prohibiting private firefighters from hooking up to public water sources. During the Palisades and Eaton Fires, LA residents were asked to limit their water usage to minimize demands on water systems. Similarly, private firefighters working for a select few individuals should limit their reliance on these systems. Public fire hydrants are a public good and we must preserve them for use by official fire departments during a fire incident.”

Equity Impact: According to the author’s staff, “Only the wealthiest individuals can afford to hire privately contracted fire protection resources. In the LA fires, we saw this disparity play out between the Palisades and Altadena. While there are many examples of private firefighters who were protecting homes and businesses in the Palisades, we have not been able to identify any who were active in the Eaton Fire. Firefighting is a public good and public water resources should be reserved for official firefighting departments to use to protect all at-risk community members.”

Background: Private firefighting services have become increasingly prominent—and controversial—in California’s wildfire response, particularly in affluent communities. Often hired by insurance providers or wealthy individuals, these companies deploy crews to protect high-value properties by applying fire retardants, clearing brush, and creating defensible space. While some local governments have contracted with private firms for additional firefighting capacity, the practice remains primarily associated with private property protection, raising questions about equity in disaster response. Insurers argue that using private firefighters helps reduce overall wildfire losses and keeps insurance companies in the California market.

The backlash against private firefighting has intensified following the Palisades and Eaton wildfires. Reports of a Los Angeles millionaire offering to pay “any amount” for private crews to protect his home, alongside a billionaire developer hiring private firefighters to safeguard a luxury shopping mall, have fueled public frustration. However, this debate isn’t new—past wildfires saw similar outrage when celebrities made headlines for employing private teams to protect their homes. Critics argue these services exacerbate inequalities, ensuring that those who can afford premium insurance or direct contracts receive enhanced protection while lower-income communities must rely on overstretched public resources.

Another growing concern is private crews’ access to public infrastructure, particularly water. Reports of private teams tapping into municipal hydrants have raised questions about whether they are diverting resources needed by public fire departments. In extreme cases, some private crews have been accused of interfering with official operations, further complicating coordination efforts.

Wildfires: 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.

Public Water Access Overwhelmed in the Palisades Fire: In the early days of the fire, extreme winds made it impossible for aerial firefighting to continue, putting a significant strain on the public water system. According to LADWP, water use spiked to four times the normal level for over 15 hours, leaving some hydrants dry. While there was no overall water shortage, the sheer demand overwhelmed the system, preventing water tanks from refilling fast enough to maintain the pressure needed to reach higher-elevation areas in the Palisades.

Tubbs Fire and Public Water Inaccessibility: During the initial hours of the 2017 Tubbs fire, the fire hydrants in the hilltop community of Fountaingrove in Santa Rosa repeatedly lost pressure. Firefighters were forced to travel to the valley of Santa Rosa, where water pressure was stronger, and then return to the hilltop to fight the fire.

Prior Legislation:

AB 2389 (Aguiar-Curry) Chapter 636, Statutes of 2018. Requires the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in collaboration with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), to develop standards and regulations for any privately contracted private fire prevention resources operating during an active fire incident in the state.

Double Referral: Should this bill be approved, it will be referred to the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Professional Firefighters (Sponsor)

Opposition

None on file.

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