

Date of Hearing: June 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

SB 904 (Seyarto) – As Amended June 17, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Recovery from wildfires

SUMMARY: This bill requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), in consultation with other state agencies, following specified wildfire state of emergencies, to make various reports related to permitting requirements and building codes that could hinder or improve rebuilding efforts; and require state and local agencies involved in post-wildfire response and recovery to, starting in 2028, accept electronic submissions of recovery-related documentation, as specified.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines “substantial structural damage requiring significant rebuilding efforts” to mean the destruction of 25 or more residential or commercial structures.
- 2) Requires the following if the Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) makes a written determination, within 10 days after the date that the Governor declared a state of emergency relating to a wildfire, that a wildfire caused substantial structural damage requiring significant rebuilding efforts:
 - a. HCD, in consultation with the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI), CalOES, and the Department of General Services (DGS) to, within 30 days,:
 - i. provide a report to the Governor and the Legislature identifying state permitting requirements that may unduly impede efforts to rebuild properties or facilities destroyed as a result of the wildfire that should be considered for suspension, and
 - ii. to update that report every 60 days, as appropriate, and as recovery and rebuilding efforts proceed, to identify any additional permitting requirements that are posing barriers to rebuilding and that should be considered for suspension.
 - b. HCD, in consultation with DGS, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OFSM), and the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission (Energy Commission), within 60 days, to review and provide a report to the Governor and the Legislature with recommendations regarding any provision of the California Building Standards Code that should be suspended in order to facilitate rapid, safe, wildfire-resilient, and cost-effective rebuilding and recovery for projects to repair, restore, demolish, or replace properties or facilities substantially damaged or destroyed as a result of the wildfire that are in substantially the same location as, and do not exceed 110 percent of the footprint and height of, the original site as specified.

- c. HCD, upon the Governor's declaration of a state of emergency relating to a wildfire, to coordinate with local governments to identify and recommend procedures that:
 - i. include, but are not limited to, exploring the use of preapproved plans and waivers of certain permitting requirements, to establish rapid permitting and approval processes to expedite the reconstruction or replacement of residential properties destroyed or damaged by a wildfire
 - ii. have the ultimate goal of issuing all necessary permits and approvals within 30 days of submission.
 - d. HCD to, within 60 days, provide a report to the Governor and the Legislature, identifying recommended updates to local government procedures that achieve the goals described in (c) above and update the report every 60 days, as specified.
- 3) Permits CalOES to make the written determination that necessitates the above actions and reports based on an estimation of the data and preliminary damage assessments available at the time of the determination.
- 4) Specifies what HCD may incorporate by reference into any of the required reports and how the reports must be submitted to the Legislature, as specified.
- 5) Requires, starting January 1, 2028, every state agency or political subdivision, upon the Governor's declaration of a state of emergency relating to a wildfire, involved in post-disaster response, debris removal, reconstruction, housing, or land-use to accept electronic submission of any application, form, plan set, appeal, or request for state agency or political subdivision action related to recovery efforts for that state of emergency, with exceptions as specified.
- 6) Authorizes the electronic submission to include the following features:
 - a. Allow submission through a web-based application portal;
 - b. Allow email submission of a document in PDF or other standard digital format;
 - c. Allow electronic signatures, which shall be deemed valid under the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act; and
 - d. Allow submission of digital plan sets or drawings at any scale accepted by the state agency or political subdivision for paper plans.
- 7) Prohibits a state agency or political subdivision from requiring physical, in-person filing of an application unless the state agency or political subdivision determines, in writing, that electronic submission is not technically feasible for that specific application type.
- 8) Prohibits a state agency or political subdivision from rejecting an application or other document solely because it was submitted electronically.
- 9) Requires every affected state agency or political subdivision to publish on its website, within 30 days of the declaration of a state of emergency for a wildfire, all of the following:
 - a. Information regarding the electronic filing method that may be used to submit documents to the state agency or political subdivision relating to disaster recovery

efforts, including the email address to submit documents, a link to the web-based application portal, or both;

- b. Information regarding required file formats; and
- c. Contact information for electronic filing support.

10) Provides that this bill does not prohibit a state agency or political subdivision from also accepting paper submissions.

11) Provides that the electronic submission requirements above shall not apply to:

- a. a county with a population of less than 100,000 or any city within that county; or
- b. A city with a population of less than 50,000

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Emergency Services Act (CESA) to ensure that preparations within the state will be adequate to deal with the effects of natural, manmade, or war-caused emergencies that result in conditions of disaster or in extreme peril to life, property, and the resources of the state, and generally to protect the health and safety and preserve the lives and property of the people of the state. [Government Code (GOV) 8550 *et seq.*]
- 2) Includes the following definitions within CESA:
 - a. “State agency” means any department, division, independent establishment, or agency of the executive branch of the state government. (GOV 8557(a))
 - b. “Political subdivision” includes any city, city and county, county, district, or other local governmental agency or public agency authorized by law. (GOV 8557(b))
- 3) Authorizes the Governor to make, amend, and rescind orders and regulations necessary to carry out the provisions of CESA, and provides that any orders and regulations issued during a state of emergency shall take effect immediately. (GOV 8567)
- 4) Authorizes the Governor, during a state of emergency, to suspend any regulatory statute, or statute prescribing the procedure for conduct of state business, or the orders, rules, or regulations of any state agency, where the Governor determines and declares that strict compliance with any statute, order, rule, or regulation would prevent, hinder, or delay the mitigation of the effects of the emergency. (GOV 8571)
- 5) Establishes CalOES, within the office of the Governor, and makes CalOES responsible for the state’s emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies, including the responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property. (GOV 8585)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations:

HCD estimates ongoing costs in the low millions of dollars annually for 6.0 – 10.0 PY of staff resources across program, technical, and management classifications to support policy and construction standards analysis, IT support, interagency coordination, stakeholder engagement, and report development. Actual ongoing costs will depend on final staffing

levels, the scope of reporting, and the frequency of wildfire emergencies, which will drive workload variability. HCD would also incur one-time costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, to make necessary IT improvements to expand electronic application capabilities within existing systems. (General Fund)

The California Energy Commission (CEC) indicates that the workload associated with this bill would require at least 1.0 PY of additional staff, at a cost of approximately \$214,000 annually, to be positioned on short notice and at unknown frequencies. Required activities include reviewing the Energy Code, making recommendations on standards to suspend, coordinating with HCD, and updating the CEC website to provide guidance and the ability to submit forms electronically. (Energy Resources Program Account)

OES estimates impacts from this bill would be absorbable by existing staff, including any costs to make written determinations that a Governor declared wildfire disaster caused substantial structural damage requiring significant rebuilding efforts. The Office of Land Use and Innovation (LCI), OES, the Department of General Services (DGS), and the State Fire Marshal (SFM) all report that any costs to consult with HCD on specified reports to the Governor and Legislature following a determination by OES would be absorbable. (General Fund)

Unknown, potentially significant state-mandated local costs related to the requirements that every political subdivision involved in post-disaster response, debris removal, reconstruction, housing, or land-use permitting must accept electronic submissions of any applications, forms, plans, and other documents related to recovery efforts. Staff notes that the bill excludes counties with a population of less than 100,000 and any city within those counties from this requirement. These costs could be state-reimbursable, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates, should an affected local agency file a successful claim. (General Fund)

COMMENTS:

Author Statement: “In January 2025, the Palisades Fire and other Los Angeles County wildfires destroyed thousands of homes and upended entire neighborhoods. Executive Order N-4-25 responded with decisive coordination by suspending duplicative barriers, aligning state and local agencies, and setting a clear goal of issuing necessary permits within 30 days so families could begin rebuilding. SB-904 ensures that this level of urgency is not dependent on a single executive order and strengthens interagency collaboration, so recovery does not stall in bureaucracy. Californians who lose their homes deserve clarity, speed, and commitment from their government in its response to all wildfire disasters.”

California Emergency Services Act: The California Emergency Services Act (CESA) was enacted in 1970, and established OES within the Governor’s Office. Under the CESA, OES is charged with coordinating statewide emergency preparedness; post emergency recovery and mitigation efforts; and the development, review, approval, and integration of emergency plans.

The CESA gives the Governor authority to proclaim a state of emergency in an area affected or likely to be affected when: a) conditions of disaster or extreme peril exist; b) the Governor is requested to do so upon request from a designated local government official; or c) the Governor finds that local authority is inadequate to cope with the emergency. Local governments may also

issue local emergency proclamations, which is a prerequisite for requesting the Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency.

State of Emergency: The CESA defines a "state of emergency" as the duly proclaimed existence of conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state caused by conditions such as air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, drought, cyberterrorism, sudden and severe energy shortage, plant or animal infestation or disease, the Governor's warning of an earthquake or volcanic prediction, or an earthquake, or other conditions, other than conditions resulting from a labor controversy or conditions causing a "state of war emergency," which, by reason of their magnitude, are or are likely to be beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment, and facilities of any single county, city and county, or city and require the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to combat, or with respect to regulated energy utilities, a sudden and severe energy shortage requires extraordinary measures beyond the authority vested in the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

Governor has expansive powers under the CESA: The CESA gives the Governor broad powers to declare emergencies, make related executive orders, and allocate funds to support related activities. CESA authorizes the Governor to make, amend, and rescind executive orders and regulations related to a proclaimed state of emergency or state of war emergency. The orders and regulations have the force and effect of law while active.

Additionally, the Governor is authorized to suspend any regulatory statute, or statute prescribing the procedure for conduct of state business, or the orders, rules, or regulations of any state agency, where the Governor determines and declares that strict compliance with any statute, order, rule, or regulation would prevent, hinder, or delay the mitigation of the effects of the emergency.

The Administration, through the Department of Finance (DOF) can allocate funds from the Disaster-Response Emergency Operations Account (DREOA) to state departments for emergency costs with modest requirements to notify the legislature. CESA allows the Governor to spend any available funds to respond to an emergency, redirect special funds, direct state departments to spend funds appropriated for specific purposes, and use state department personnel, property, equipment, and appropriations to respond to an emergency.

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 increases the urgency to address this threat. According to data from CAL FIRE, 18 of California's 20 most destructive fires have occurred in the past decade. Collectively, these fires have resulted in 231 deaths and the loss of 66,810 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 713 structures and damage to 57 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).

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. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) estimated the fires' total property and capital losses could range between \$76 billion and \$131 billion, with insured losses estimated up to \$45 billion.¹ 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 Eaton Fire resulted in 9,413 buildings being destroyed, 1,074 structures damaged, and 19 confirmed civilian fatalities. The Palisades Fire resulted in 6,833 structures destroyed, 973 structures damaged, and 12 confirmed civilian fatalities. The blazes burned a combined 37,728 acres and leveled entire communities in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods of LA County.

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.

EO-N-4-25: Following Governor Newsom's State of Emergency proclamation, he issued a 25 executive orders (EO) to aid recovery, protect survivors, expedite wildfire safety regulations, and facilitate wildfire prevention projects. The third order, EO N-4-25², issued January 12, 2025, exempted work to rebuild devastated areas from environmental review and provided other directives aimed at rebuilding in impacted areas. Section 1 of this bill seeks to codify three of these directives:

4. The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, the Office of Emergency Services, and the Department of General Services (DGS) shall, within 30 days, provide a report to me identifying other state permitting requirements that may unduly impede efforts to rebuild properties or facilities destroyed as a result of this emergency that should be considered for suspension, and shall update that report every 60 days, as appropriate and as recovery and rebuilding efforts proceed, to identify any additional permitting requirements that are posing barriers to rebuilding and that should be considered for suspension.

5. HCD, in consultation with DGS, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and the California Energy Commission, shall, within 60 days, review and provide a report to me with recommendations regarding any provision of the Building Standards Code, Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations, that should be suspended for projects... [that repair, restore, demolish, or replace property or facilities substantially damaged or destroyed as a result of this emergency, and that are in substantially the same location as, and do not exceed 110% of the footprint and height of properties and facilities that were legally established and

¹ Economic Impact of the Los Angeles Wildfires, <https://www.anderson.ucla.edu/about/centers/ucla-anderson-forecast/economic-impact-los-angeles-wildfires>

² EO-N-4-25, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/EO-N-4-25-Rebuilding-Final-signed.pdf>

existed before this emergency] in order to facilitate rapid, safe, and cost effective rebuilding and recovery.

6. HCD shall coordinate with local governments to identify and recommend procedures, including but not limited to exploring the use of pre-approved plans and waivers of certain permitting requirements, to establish rapid permitting and approval processes to expedite the reconstruction or replacement of residential properties destroyed or damaged by fire. The recommended procedures shall have the ultimate goal of issuing all necessary permits and approvals within 30 days. HCD shall, within 60 days, provide a report to me identifying recommended updates to local government procedures that achieve these goals, and shall update that report every 60 days, as appropriate, to identify any additional permitting and approval requirements that are barriers to recovery and rebuilding efforts that should be removed.

In its current form, this bill differs from EO N-4-25 in its codification of paragraph 5. This bill adds that the recommendations for suspending any provision of the Building Standards Code should also be in order to facilitate wildfire-resilient rebuilding and recovery. This bill does not automatically suspend any provision of the California Building Standards Code nor any state or local permitting requirements.

Building Standards: The California Building Standards Law establishes the process for adopting state building standards by the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC). Statewide building standards are intended to provide uniformity in building across the state. The California Building Standards Commission's (CBSC) duties include the following: receiving proposed building standards from state agencies for consideration in each triennial and intervening building code adoption cycle; reviewing and approving building standards submitted by state agencies; adopting building standards for state buildings where no other state agency is authorized by law; and publishing the approved building standards in the California Building Standards Code (California Code of Regulations, Title 24).

Updates and changes to building standards are adopted on two timelines: through the triennial code adoption cycle which occurs every three years, and through the intervening code adoption cycle which provides an update to codes 18 months after the publication of the triennial codes. Regulatory activities for each cycle begin over two years before the effective date of the codes.

Arguments in Support: The California Apartment Association writes, "SB 904 would codify many of the reporting requirements issued in Governor Newsom's Executive Orders following the Eaton and Palisades fires in January 2025. This means whenever a future wildfire state of emergency is declared by a Governor, the Department of Housing and Community Development will automatically submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature identifying state permitting requirements that may impede efforts to rebuild properties or facilities destroyed by a wildfire that should be considered for suspension following a wildfire state of emergency. This process would speed up our state's recovery efforts in the future."

Arguments in Opposition: Climate Action California's Building Decarbonization team writes "Building standards in California are developed and revised with extensive stakeholder input. As a result, California's Building Code serves as a bulwark against shoddy construction methods that have plagued homeowners in many other states. In states with less stringent building codes, homeowners have found themselves without recourse when faced with extensive problems with

their new homes that are not built to a robust standard. While rebuilding after wildfires and other disasters must absolutely be prioritized, we believe that rolling back provisions that result in expensive repairs or higher energy costs later is not the way forward.”

Double-Referred: This bill was first referred to the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee, where it passed with an 11-1-0 vote.

Committee Amendments:

The major provisions of Committee amendments do the following:

- 1) Prohibits the reports and recommendations from including building standards adopted by the State Fire Marshal that relate to panic safety and fire safety as standards to be considered for suspension.
- 2) Removes the requirement that the workgroup and associated report in Sec. 1. (c) is activated upon each written determination from Cal OES following a state of emergency declaration, to instead require the workgroup’s formation and completion of a single report by July 1, 2028 that is reviewed and updated as necessary after every update to the California Building Standards Code (every 3 years).

Formal Committee Amendments are as follows:

Amendment 1

In the title, in line 1, strike out “8608.2 and 8608.3” and insert: 8608.2, 8608.3, and 8608.4

Amendment 2

On page 3, between lines 3 and 4, insert:

- (3) Nothing in this section shall include

Amendment 3

On page 3, in line 4, after “(b)” insert:

- (1)

Amendment 4

On page 3, strike out lines 17 to 34, inclusive, in line 35, strike out “relating to a wildfire, the Department” and insert:

- (2) The Department

Amendment 5

On page 4, in line 3, strike out “The” and insert:

(3) The

Amendment 6

On page 4, in line 8, strike out “this subdivision,” and insert:
paragraph (2),

Amendment 7

On page 4, in line 12, strike out “(e)” and insert:

(c)

Amendment 8

On page 4, between lines 18 and 19, insert:

SEC. 2. Section 8608.3 is added to the Government Code, to read:

8608.3. (a) On or before than July 1, 2028, the Department of Housing and Community Development, in consultation with the Department of General Services, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, and the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, shall convene a workgroup to review and provide a report to the Governor and the Legislature with recommendations regarding any provision of the California Building Standards Code (Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations) that should be suspended for the projects described in subdivision (b) to facilitate rapid, safe, disaster-resilient, and cost-effective rebuilding and recovery guidance for any future state of emergency.

(b) Subdivision (a) applies to projects to repair, restore, demolish, or replace substantial structural damage requiring significant rebuilding efforts, as described in Section 8608.2, caused as a result of a state of emergency and are situated in substantially the same location as, and do not exceed 110 percent of the footprint and height of, the residential or commercial structures that were legally established and existed immediately before the state of emergency.

(c) After the release of every update to the California Building Standards Code, the workgroup shall review and update, as necessary, the report required by subdivision (a).

(d) Nothing in this section shall include building standards adopted by the State Fire Marshal that relate to panic safety and fire safety as standards to be considered for suspension.

(e) Every report submitted to the Legislature pursuant to this section shall be in compliance with Section 9795.

Amendment 9

On page 4, strike out lines 19 and 20, in line 21, strike out “8608.3.” and insert:

SEC. 3. Section 8608.4 is added to the Government Code, to read:
8608.4.

Amendment 10

On page 5, in line 33, strike out “SEC. 3.” and insert:

SEC. 4.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Council of Engineering Companies of California
California Apartment Association
California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Southwest California Legislative Council

Opposition

Climate Action California

Analysis Prepared by: Ryan Fleming / E.M. / (916) 319-3802