



FIRESCOPE – Call to Action

At the request of Fire Chief Brian Fennessy, Chair of the FIRESCOPE Board of Directors, a facilitated workshop was held on February 5/6, 2025, at the Pasadena Rose Bowl to review the effectiveness and stressors of the California Fire/Rescue response system. This effort was bolstered at the same time with the issuance of the **Governor's Executive Order #N-18-25** (https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/EO-_Urban-Conflagration-N-18-25-Final.pdf).

The workshop was not intended as a review of the recent Palisades and Eaton wildfires. Instead, it focused on the longstanding challenges that have placed stress on California's fire service at the federal, state, and local levels. Additionally, the workshop aimed to encourage the fire service to reflect not only on past and present issues but also to anticipate and prepare for future challenges.

This process was predicated by the Board of Director's review of the:

- CA Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force Plan
<https://wildfiretaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/californiawildfireandforestresilienceactionplan.pdf>
- 2003 (updated in 2008) Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission(BRC) Report
<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Fire-Rescue/Documents/20080118-BRC-BRC-Task-Force-Update.pdf>
- 2023 Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's (WFMMC) Report
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>

The CA fire service also recognizes the three core elements backed by science within the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy document:

<https://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/building.shtml>

- Restoring Landscapes
- Creating Fire Adapted Communities
- Employing a Robust Response System

For the purposes of discussion within the limited time available, the FIREScope Board of Directors and Partner Agencies focused on elements of the response system while acknowledging that landscapes and communities are essential components for achieving overall resilience.

General agreements among participants included:

- FIREScope is frustrated with the slow progress in completing action items and is calling for clearly defined, goal-oriented actions supported by appropriate funding and measurable success metrics.
- FIREScope takes full responsibility for California's fire response system, shares preparedness efforts, and plays a role in recovery.
- Wildfires are occurring more frequently, higher losses and are much larger in scale. Much of the devastating losses occur during the first 24-hours of an incident.
- FIREScope should take a forward-looking approach, focusing on the future challenges of wildfires rather than solely on historical and present issues.
- Wildfires do not have a season anymore, rather being a year-round incident type.
- Wildfires can be destructive while at the same time being beneficial to our environment and how we manage our lands.
- To achieve greater resilience, investing in proactive preparation is far more effective than focusing solely on response efforts.
- There is a wide array of issues associated with the changing workforce at all levels. Federal workforce staffing challenges result in operational and relationship stressors among all levels of participants.
- Since not all FIREScope partners have the authority to represent their parent agencies, consensus within FIREScope reflects agreement only among participants at their respective levels.
- Continue to pursue goal achievement on recommendations within the updated relevant 2008 Blue Ribbon Commission Report, CA Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force Plan, and the 2023 Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's Report.
- Doing more with less (people and policies) is not an option.
- Consider improving county-wide "community" wildfire plans to include implementation needs to achieve an acceptable resiliency level.
- We acknowledge that prescribed fires must play a crucial role in the future to effectively manage large-scale fuel loads.
- Success depends on public and policymaker support in embracing a cultural shift toward "**Living with Wildfire.**" Both groups must recognize and actively support action steps to address wildfire challenges.
- Currently, public and elected officials' engagement in proactive community hardening is insufficient relative to present and future hazards
- Support the California State Fire Marshal's (SFM) initiatives/actions, with a stronger focus on the already existing built environment, i.e. Communities and infrastructure.
- Collaborate with planners, building officials, and other stakeholders in key processes, such as incorporating wildfire safety into General Plan Safety Elements.
- There is a distinct difference between traditional wildfires and today's urban conflagrations in the built environment (WUI fires), which require different metrics, response strategies and solutions.
- Current ordering systems, aid agreements, and reimbursement processes are inadequate to meet today's operational resource demands.
- Technological advancements in wildfire response systems have been hindered by implementation barriers and funding limits.
- Evacuations are increasingly difficult due to population growth and existing substandard access routes. Current evacuation systems, including communication and alert systems, do not meet the speed and demand required today.
- During the recovery process, maintaining strict adherence to building codes and planning conditions is essential to prevent compromises as communities rebuild after significant wildfire losses.

Below are the recommended actions that build on the three previously referenced background documents (not necessarily in priority order):

Item	Recommendation / Justification	Responsible Entity/ entities	Priority High Medium Low
Overall			
1	Forward a letter of support for the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's report recommendations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows support of non-response and response priorities for resiliency efforts. 	FIRESCOPE	H Immediately
2	Forward a letter of support for the CA Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force Plan and formalize relations between both entities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows support of non-response and response priorities for resiliency efforts. 	FIRESCOPE	H Immediately
3	Allocate funding and establish a dedicated workgroup with full-time responsibility to implement Recommendations #12-13, rather than relying on a reserve capacity approach. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This full-time workgroup will provide focus and timely decision points to the CA Legislature. 	CA Legislature FIRESCOPE	H (due 6/2025)
4	CA Gov to require an annual progress report of these recommendations and review of the CA Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A final resolve to the wildfire problem can only be achieved via accountability. 	CAL OES	M annual
5	Provide funding to produce a documentary aimed at increasing public and policymaker engagement in proactive community hardening to address both current and future wildfire hazards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many educational efforts have been made to the public, but policy makers are the key to the hard decisions at all levels of government. 	CA Legislature	H (due 2/2026)
6	Fund all contracts and operations for a "year-round" wildfire season. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are still experiencing "seasonal" crews, process, approvals and contracts for air and ground resources while we are engaging in "year-round" wildfires. 	CA Legislature	H Immediately

Preparedness			
7	<p>Better define the role of the State Board of Forestry (BOF) and the SFM regarding land management and the built environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BOF charter was designed for a “resources” environment, not a community design. SFM duties are more applicable to codes and ordinances for emerging population demands. 	CA Legislature	M Immediately
8	<p>Create a stable funding source for the CA Fire Safe Council coordination with cities/counties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CFSC has been operating via grants and annual funding to assist counties with wildfire planning activities. A permanent funding source will provide better long-term planning and operations. 	CA Legislature	M Immediately
9	<p>Create a statewide “Data Commons” to fully display the state of insurance issues and background for resolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CA, like most states, only has valid data for the “Admitted” insurance market. A comprehensive Data Commons will ensure better long-term planning for the DOI and fire services. 	Insurance Commissioner DOI	M Immediately
10	<p>Focus needs on the built environment by retroactively hardening homes and investing in Community Risk Reduction (CRR) actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While new codes and planning conditions assist emergency preparations, we must fully address the largest threat, the vast inventory of existing structures in the built environment. 	CA Legislature SFM	H Immediately
11	<p>Provide stability in the insurance market by promulgating model home hardening metrics and funding actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt new science models that identify priority home hardening aspects. 	Insurance Commissioner DOI CA Legislature	H Immediately

Response			
12	<p>Provide funding and establish a study group to develop a consensus on rate factors and formulas, supporting a comprehensive agreement among local, state, and federal agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Such an agreement will greatly simplify the ordering process, increase available resources and eliminate the “shopping around” for the best deals. Response agreements need to be flexible and fluid to meet the affected jurisdiction needs (day-to-day vs major incident needs). Align CICCIS, 310-1, NWCG, 4039 standards. 	FIRESCOPE plus NASF & Federal partners CA Legislature	H (due 9/2025)
13	<p>Provide funding and establish a study group to design an advanced ordering system for California that aligns with a national resource ordering framework, prioritizing the deployment of the closest and most qualified resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CA needs an internal ordering system that can meet tomorrow’s operational needs yet realize that this new system must be compatible with a national system when CA exhausts its internal resources. Build off the 2005 MASTF report: https://emilms.fema.gov/is_0706/assets/874E1D3F-E87A-F6F2-DBC2-9E996008E57C.pdf 	FIRESCOPE plus NASF & Federal partners CA Legislature	H (due 9/2025)
14	<p>Cal OES to become the “clearinghouse for all aid agreement reimbursements, to local government entities will be paid within 90-days of service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes are needed to allow for more rapid reimbursements to response entities to enable greater participation and increase the pool of potential response capability. 	CA Legislature Cal OES	H Immediately
15	<p>Support federal workforce enhancements to avoid the domino effect on State and Local government firefighting operations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce staffing challenges result in operational and relationship issues among all levels of participants. 	FIRESCOPE CA Legislature	H Immediately
16	<p>Put Fed partners on notice that they must perform their responsibilities or compensate the State/Locals to do so on their behalf.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing reciprocal agreements are not always reciprocal and leave voids in fire service areas. 	FIRESCOPE CA Legislature	H Immediately

17	<p>Review the effectiveness of the Cal OES fleet program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Cal OES Fleet program is a national model but needs to be re-evaluated to measure if it is fully effective and/or identify stress points. 	Cal OES	M (due 2/2026)
18	<p>Remove the barriers that inhibit new technology based on Common Operating Platforms (COPs) and interoperability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize all available tech to prevent, minimize, and mitigate incident hazards. Not all technology is interoperable nor financially available to all parties, i.e., CADs, AVO, FF tracking, etc. 	CA Legislature State & Local procurement	H Immediately
19	<p>Create and ensure universal broadband coverage with backup power across CA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing and emerging decision support tools require broadband services to be fully maximized. 	CA Legislature	H Immediately
20	<p>Fund and support the CA Intelligence Center.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New decision support tools require dynamic data sources to be fully functional (Wildfire Forecast & Threat Intelligence Integration Center – WFTIIC https://hub.wftiic.ca.gov). 	CA Legislature	M Immediately
21	<p>Create and ensure universal common CA evacuation terminology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CA data indicates a transient population pool that needs continuing public education. About evacuation terminology and processes due to the all-risk environment. 	Cal OES	H Immediately
22	<p>FIRESCOPE and Cal OES Law Branch to meet to develop model evacuation process guidelines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is not just a State function, this also applies to city/county fire/law entities and special districts. All entities need to practice and fully understand their respective roles and capabilities. 	Cal OES City/County govt	M Immediately
23	<p>Create timely emergency notification/alert systems to address community needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evacuation systems, including communication systems and alerts, are inadequate for today's speed and demand requirements Develop effective alert systems that fully recognize the "digital divide" among the diverse population pools. (Cal OES Wireless Emergency Alerts Website http://calalerts.org/about.html Statewide 	Cal OES	H (due 2/2026)

	Alert & Warning Guidelines (https://calalerts.org/documents/2024_AWG_guidelines_AWPlan.pdf)		
Recovery			
24	Public policy must recognize that upfront preparedness and response investments greatly reduce the recovery aspects at all levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Pay now or pay even more later” 	CA Legislature Local Govt	H Immediately
25	Ensure that there are no “rollbacks” in Chapter 7A and planning requirements during rebuilding of communities following major wildfires. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build for wildfire resiliency. Modern planning and codes can ensure a higher level of resiliency with lower life and property loss. 	SFM CA Legislature Local Govt	H Immediately
26	Develop enhanced repopulation processes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public demands to re-enter hazard areas after a wildfire stress all facets of emergency response and compliance systems need to be built within community infrastructure prior to an incident. 	Cal OES Fire & Law	H (due 2/2026)
27	Create <u>Recovery</u> Incident Management Teams (IMTs) that succeed the <u>Response</u> IMTs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many communities do not have adequate and/or trained staff for the recovery process. Specialty State sponsored IMTs can vastly improve client services and community resiliency. (Cal OES was provided full funding for IMATs and ISTs http://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/operations/response-operations/headquarters-response/) 	Cal OES	M (due 2/2026)

Background:

The California Disaster Councils first Fire Advisory Board was appointed by Governor Earl Warren, October 8, 1945. Following a series of major destructive wildfires in 1970, FIRESCOPE was established. In September 1986, the decision-making process and composition of FIRESCOPE was combined with the Cal OES Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Committee. Senate Bill 27, chaptered on October 2, 1989, established the FIRESCOPE Program. The mission of the Cal OES Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Board is to provide recommendations and technical guidance to the Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) on matters involving mutual aid; and as the FIRESCOPE Board, maintain the FIRESCOPE Decision Process; and to continue the operation, development, and maintenance of the FIRESCOPE Incident Command System (ICS) and the Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS). <https://firescope.caloes.ca.gov>