



## **Statement by Gov. Schwarzenegger on Blue Ribbon Task Force Report on 2007 Fires**

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger today issued the following statement after a Blue Ribbon Task Force released their report on the devastating Southern California wildfires of 2007. The Governor requested the report in November to help assess how federal, state and local level governments can better prevent and fight future fires.

“I commend the task force for working diligently on this report to find ways to better protect Californians and fight fires. California, with our vast and beautiful terrain, is threatened by natural disasters which require us to have a world-class emergency response system,” said Governor Schwarzenegger. “I am very proud of the heroic and selfless work performed by our brave firefighters during last year’s devastating fires. After any major disaster, we must analyze our response and find ways to improve. I am pleased that my budget priorities are consistent with many of the recommendations made in this report.”

The Governor's 2008-09 budget proposal supports California's ability to prepare for and respond to the wide range of emergencies and natural disasters and significantly strengthens the state's wild land firefighting capabilities for the benefit of all Californians. Highlights include:

- \$3 million General Fund to replace older Office of Emergency Services (OES) radios.
- \$2 million General Fund for OES to enhance OASIS, a satellite-based communications system that helps different operational areas and regions communicate during an emergency or disaster.
- \$1.6 million General Fund and \$1.6 million in federal funds to increase OES staff in order to enhance emergency preparedness, response and recovery operations.
- \$1.3 million General Fund to provide 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-per-week staffing at the state's Joint Operations Center (JOC). This will enable the California National Guard (CNG) to rapidly deploy personnel and equipment during an emergency or disaster.

The Wildland Firefighting Initiative will not be funded through the General Fund. It will be financed through a 1.25 percent surcharge on all property owners statewide, amounting to approximately \$10-12 per property owner each year.

Details of the Wildland Firefighting Initiative include:

CAL FIRE (\$77.8 million):

- \$28.9 million and 1,100 seasonal firefighters to staff all 336 state fire engines with full four-member crews during peak and transition fire seasons.
- \$4.2 million and 3.8 positions to install GPS tracking on key pieces of equipment, such as fire engines and aircraft, linked to computer-aided dispatching.
- \$44.7 million in 2008-09 to backfill the budget balancing reductions CAL FIRE is taking to its fire protection budget. Restoring these budget-balancing reductions will prevent the closing of 20 one-engine fire stations, 11 conservation camps and 1 helitack base.
- A multi-year expenditure plan to enable CAL FIRE to purchase 11 new, all-weather, 24-hour firefighting helicopters over the next six years.

OES: (\$12.1 million):

- \$8.1 million in 2008-09 to purchase 26 fire engines as part of the first year of a five-year cycle to purchase and maintain a total of 131 additional fire engines.
- \$1.9 million in 2008-09 to backfill the budget-balancing reductions OES is taking to its Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid Response section and its Warning Center/Information Technology/Telecommunications section.
- \$1.6 million and 9.2 positions in 2008-09 to enhance response to wildland fires throughout the state.
- \$480,000 to fund the increased maintenance and fuel costs of OES' existing fleet of fire engines and vehicles.
- The Office of Homeland Security will make grant funding available to ensure that telephone emergency notification is available in all counties that do not currently have these systems. Learn more about this proposal at <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/press-release/8396/>.

CNG (\$9.2 million):

- \$4.4 million in 2008-09 and 36 positions to provide 24-hours-a-day, seven-days per-week coverage and full-time helicopter crews to be able to respond to any emergency situation in California in a matter of four hours or less.
- \$2.6 million in 2008-09 to purchase the first of two Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS) over two years for the Military Department's C-130J aircraft.
- \$2.2 million in 2008-09 to purchase the first of three Firehawk firefighting systems over three years.

In November, the Governor requested that the Blue Ribbon Task Force to thoroughly assess the next steps at all levels of government to evaluate how the role of greater cross-agency training and resources, local planning, defensible space, building standards, Fire Safe Councils, public education and other public policies can and should play in preventing and fighting fires.

The Blue Ribbon Fire Commission was established in November 2003. In April 2004, the Commission issued 48 recommendations for improving emergency preparedness to prevent and respond to California wildfires. The recommendations included eight federal recommendations, 20 state recommendations, one local recommendation and 19 recommendations that involved multiple jurisdictions.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force was formed after the recommendations were submitted by the commission and includes representatives from county and city firefighting officials, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), OES, state fire chiefs and labor unions including the California Professional Firefighters Association and the California State Firefighters' Association.

Over the past four years, Governor Schwarzenegger has increased funding to state fire protection by 84 percent. This amounts to \$259 million for equipment, firefighters, planning and fuels management. Since 2003, 109 new engines have been purchased to replace old CAL FIRE engines at a cost of \$26.5 million.

In July 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger signed [Executive Order](#) S-6-05, allocating significant resources to fulfill the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission's recommendations. This included:

- \$10.8 million to replace aging fire engines.
- \$9 million for year-round staffing at fire-season levels in San Diego, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.
- \$12 million over five years for state-of-the-art radio equipment to increase interoperability between CAL FIRE, federal and local officials.

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