



# 2023 I-10 FREEWAY FIRE AFTER ACTION REPORT



The aftermath of a large fire destroyed part of the I -10 Freeway in Los Angeles. Source: KTLA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>SUMMARY OF SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>SUMMARY OF AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>INCIDENT PERIOD.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>DECLARATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>STATE OF EMERGENCY .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>INCIDENT BACKGROUND .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>I-10 FREEWAY FIRE .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – STATE AGENCIES.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>RESPONSE OPERATIONS .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (Caltrans) .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL (CHP) .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – OPERATIONAL AREAS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>LOS ANGELES COUNTY.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>CITY OF LOS ANGELES .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>SUCCESSES .....</i>	<i>9</i>

## AFTER ACTION REPORT: 2023 I-10 FREEWAY FIRE

<b>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT</b> .....	9
<b>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	10
<b>INITIAL RECOVERY ACTIVITIES – STATE AGENCIES</b> .....	11
<b>SUCCESSES</b> .....	11
<b>AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT</b> .....	11
<b>CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	11
<b>INITIAL RECOVERY ACTIVITIES – OPERATIONAL AREAS</b> .....	12
<b>LOS ANGELES COUNTY</b> .....	12
<b>CITY OF LOS ANGELES</b> .....	12
On November 20, 2023, the City of Los Angeles activated the LBARC to provide support to local businesses impacted by the fire and subsequent freeway closure. The services were rendered through December 5, 2023.....	12
<b>CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES</b> .....	1
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b> .....	1

## FOREWORD

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Per the Emergency Services Act, Article 9.5, Government Code Section 8607(f), the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), in cooperation with involved state and local agencies, shall complete an After Action Report (AAR) after each gubernatorial-proclaimed disaster. This report shall provide a review of public safety response and disaster recovery activities and conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. Cal OES shall make the report available to all interested public safety and emergency management organizations.

An After Action Report serves the following essential functions:

- Provides a source for documenting response and early recovery activities
- Identifies successes and areas needing improvement during emergency operations
- Analyzes the effectiveness of the different components of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)
- Describes and defines a plan of corrective action for implementing recommended improvements to existing emergency response efforts

Representatives of public safety or emergency management organizations can obtain a copy of this report by submitting a request to:

[SharedMail.CalAAR@CalOES.ca.gov](mailto:SharedMail.CalAAR@CalOES.ca.gov)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The following report provides an overview of the 2023 Interstate 10 (I-10) Freeway Fire. On November 11, 2023, a fire caused by arson ignited under the I-10 freeway in downtown Los Angeles. The blaze rapidly engulfed a pallet storage yard and several trailers, spreading to a second pallet storage yard. Over 160 firefighters from 26 companies, assisted by helicopter support, contained the fire within three hours, saving three commercial buildings. The fire caused a complete freeway closure in both directions for eight days. The freeway reopened on November 20, 2023.



### SUMMARY OF SUCCESSES

- There was clear and effective communication and coordination between the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), its internal programs, and the City of Los Angeles.
- Caltrans used a video conferencing platform to unify its Headquarters Department Operations Center (DOC) and District Emergency Operations Center (EOC) sections under one incident team with dedicated channels, allowing remote and on-site staff to support Incident Command System (ICS) functions and strengthen operations.

### SUMMARY OF AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

- SEMS was not followed at the local level, often bypassing the Operational Area (OA) and directly requesting assistance from the state.
- Caltrans identified the need for improved internal emergency management software (e.g., COP) to enhance efficiency and keep pace with rapid reporting demands.

## DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS

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### ***INCIDENT PERIOD***

I-10 Freeway Fire                      November 11, 2023, to November 19, 2023

### ***DECLARATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS***

#### ***STATE OF EMERGENCY***

Los Angeles County                      November 11, 2023

### INCIDENT BACKGROUND

#### I-10 FREEWAY FIRE

On November 11, 2023, around 12:22 a.m., the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) responded to an arson fire that erupted at a pallet storage yard under the I-10 Freeway in Los Angeles County. The fire quickly consumed multiple trailers, spreading to a second pallet storage.



The fire caused significant damage to the freeway bridge, leading to an immediate closure in both directions. LAFD coordinated with Caltrans, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the California Highway Patrol, and other agencies to extinguish the fire, establish traffic control, and conduct inspections and repairs necessary to reopen the I-10 freeway. Firefighters contained the fire within three hours with helicopter assistance, saving three commercial buildings.

The governor declared a State of Emergency to allow Federal Highway Administration relief and expedite the I-10 freeway repairs. Caltrans assessed the damage and began cleanup once the fire was fully extinguished. Caltrans and contractors worked together to remove hazardous materials and debris and add temporary supports to damaged concrete pillars. California secured “quick release” emergency funding to address initial costs, with repairs aimed for completion within three to five weeks. The ongoing repairs resulted in a complete closure in both directions until Monday, November 20, 2023, when the freeway finally reopened.

The City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department (EMD), in collaboration with the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office and other agencies, established a Local Business Assistance Resource Center (LBARC) from November 20 to December 5, 2023, to assist local businesses that experienced impacts from the fire and subsequent freeway closure.



## RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – STATE AGENCIES

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### CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

#### RESPONSE OPERATIONS

The California State Warning Center received, coordinated, verified, and disseminated notifications to all levels of government.

The Situation Cell provided early initial coordination by identifying emerging and near-term threats and trends, analyzing potential impacts, developing situation analysis reports, and updating the Planning Section with initial situational awareness and intelligence information.

The SOC activated and served as the central command and control for the State of California operations. The SOC closely monitored the incident, providing state-level coordination with its partner agencies such as Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

Cal OES Southern Region coordinated with the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management to address the City of Los Angeles’ resource needs, such as serving as a liaison with local, federal, and non-governmental partners to assist with the LBARC.

#### SUCCESSSES

1. No successes were reported.

#### AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

1. Local government did not follow SEMS, bypassing the OA and reaching out directly to the state for resources.

#### CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cal OES Regions should coordinate with the OAs to ensure their local governments are trained and understand SEMS when requesting assistance.



### **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (Caltrans)**

Caltrans collaborated with the city, county, and Cal OES to assess damage and support requests for disaster proclamations through coordination with Cal OES response and recovery branches. During the fire, Caltrans implemented and maintained road closures and traffic controls, ensuring effective communication between its Headquarters Coordination Center and the District 7 Traffic Management Center. This coordination provided timely and accurate traffic information for the traveling public and emergency responders.

On Sunday, November 12, 2023, Caltrans District 7 EOC activated virtually and issued daily situational status reports. District personnel and the Structure Maintenance and Investigations team, including Materials Engineering and Testing Services, conducted structural inspections, condition assessments, and materials testing on the freeway.

The Caltrans Public Information Officer gave multiple media interviews and shared detour, traffic, and transit updates on social media.

#### **SUCCESSES**

1. Communication, coordination, and responses were good among Caltrans internal programs and the City of Los Angeles.
2. Caltrans used a video conferencing platform to establish its Headquarters DOC and District EOC sections with dedicated channels organized under a single incident team. This setup enabled remote staff to support various ICS sections while maintaining a physical presence in the operations centers, enhancing overall operational depth.

#### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. Caltrans reported a need for improved internal emergency management software tools (i.e., COP software) to enhance overall efficiency, particularly given the fast-paced reporting cadence.

#### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Seek out functional software solutions for reporting across multiple locations.

### **CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL (CHP)**

CHP (Southern Division) assisted Caltrans with traffic control, road closures, oversized commercial load escorts, and security at various sites under the affected portion of the freeway, furthering the repair efforts.

## **AFTER ACTION REPORT: 2023 I-10 FREEWAY FIRE**

### ***SUCCESSSES***

1. No successes were reported.

### ***AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT***

1. No areas needing improvement were reported.

### ***CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS***

1. No corrective action recommendations were reported.

## RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – OPERATIONAL AREAS

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### LOS ANGELES COUNTY

The Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (LACDEO) and the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, engaged with the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles and the Economic and Workforce Development Department teams to coordinate resources and response efforts.

To support business and worker resilience, LACDEO provided responding agencies with economic impact data on 3,600 businesses within a 1-mile radius of the fire site. The information included data points such as industry type, point of contact, number of employees, estimated annual revenue, and other relevant details. The fire was estimated to affect 36,168 employees.

Los Angeles County canvassed businesses impacted by the fire, gathering critical data on the economic repercussions. The findings revealed that all affected businesses experienced significant revenue declines due to street closures, detours, and severe traffic congestion, which deterred customer access. Business owners and employees uniformly reported revenue losses of 60% or more, directly attributed to the fire and its subsequent economic disruptions.

### SUCCESSSES

1. The Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management effectively communicated with its partner agencies, both during the initial fire response and throughout the ensuing response and recovery efforts.

### AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

1. Local government bypassed the OA level and reached out directly to the state.

### CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The County has coordinated with the City of Los Angeles to ensure they follow SEMS by notifying and communicating incident response and recovery efforts, including resource needs, through the OA.

### CITY OF LOS ANGELES

The City of Los Angeles EOC was activated at Level III to coordinate response and recovery actions within the city, including the allocation of city resources for this incident. In addition to the Incident Command Post (ICP), the EOC supported an LBARC, which was activated to provide support to local businesses affected by the fire and subsequent freeway closure.

#### **SUCCESSSES**

1. Leveraging EMD representatives at the ICP to validate information, coordinate non-first responder activities, and provide timely information to the EOC was an effective practice.
2. Having EMD management present at the ICP during visits from high-ranking officials facilitated decision-making and coordination.
3. Efficiently providing timely responses and swift decision-making demonstrated effective emergency management practices.
4. Monitoring the impacts on city departments and partners during incident response highlighted the effectiveness of situational awareness and communication.
5. Expansive public information, accompanied by timely updates, helped inform the city during incidents, thereby enhancing public safety and awareness.

#### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. SEMS was not initially followed at the local level, often bypassing the OA and directly requesting assistance from the state.
2. The city's EOC did not have an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) with a contact list, resulting in confusion regarding points of contact and coordination. In addition, there were no briefings, updates, or standard EOC activities scheduled. This gap also hindered the development of effective situation reports.
3. City resources allocated to the incident were not effectively monitored and documented in the EOC.
4. The city did not have trained staff for establishing a Local Assistance Center (LAC).
5. The city did not have enough EMD staff to operate the EOC and LBARC.

## **AFTER ACTION REPORT: 2023 I-10 FREEWAY FIRE**

6. There were no standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the EMD staff activated to the ICP.

### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The city should coordinate with Los Angeles County to review and exercise the SEMS communication and resource request processes.
2. The city should develop an EOC EAP with a comprehensive contact list, a structured schedule for briefings and updates, and standardized protocols for EOC operations.
3. Research a resource-tracking system that integrates into the city EOC software.
4. Develop and conduct a Core Task Training program to train staff on proper LAC implementation at the local level.
5. Establish a local mutual aid plan for additional staffing when resources are exhausted.
6. The city should establish SOPs for the EMD that include staffing at the ICP, required equipment, and communication methods with the EOC.

## INITIAL RECOVERY ACTIVITIES – STATE AGENCIES

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### **GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES (CAL OES)**

During this event, the Cal OES Recovery Individual Assistance Unit supported the LBARC by providing extensive liaison activities with local and state agencies that offered assistance, services, and resources. Additionally, federal partners were brought in, such as the Small Business Administration and the Internal Revenue Service, to provide their assistance.

#### **SUCCESSSES**

1. No successes were reported.

#### **AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT**

1. No areas needing improvement were reported.

#### **CORRECTIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. No corrective action recommendations were reported.

## INITIAL RECOVERY ACTIVITIES – OPERATIONAL AREAS

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### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

The county's recovery team collaborated with city and state partners, along with public and private stakeholders, including Wells Fargo Philanthropy and Together for LA. They aimed to coordinate strategies and resources for LACs.

The county worked with state and federal partners to secure Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Declaration Assistance for individuals and businesses affected by the disaster. The county provided the city with EIDL declaration forms in English, Korean, and Spanish, including guidance to assist businesses with the applications. Additionally, the county connected the city response team with the Small Business Administration district director to facilitate the EIDL process.

### **CITY OF LOS ANGELES**

On November 20, 2023, the City of Los Angeles activated the LBARC to provide support to local businesses impacted by the fire and subsequent freeway closure. The services were rendered through December 5, 2023.



## CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES

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### **STATE AGENCIES**

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

California Department of Transportation

California Highway Patrol

### **LOCAL AGENCIES**

Los Angeles County

City of Los Angeles

Los Angeles Fire Department

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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AAR	After Action Report
Cal OES	California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CHP	California Highway Patrol
DOC	Department Operations Center
EAP	Emergency Action Plan
EIDL	Economic Injury Disaster Loan
EMD	Emergency Management Department (City of Los Angeles)
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
ICP	Incident Command Post
ICS	Incident Command System
LAC	Local Assistance Center
LACDEO	Los Angeles Department of Economic Opportunity
LAFD	Los Angeles Fire Department (City)
LBARC	Local Business Assistance Resource Centers
OA	Operational Area
SEMS	Standardized Emergency Management System
SOC	State Operations Center