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Wildfire Preparedness

If a wildfire started somewhere within or near your agency's boundaries, would you be ready to protect your employees and assets? The better question is, what has the agency done to reduce the potential of wildfires in agency areas? With all the unfortunate disasters in recent years, we need to be vigilant on our preventative maintenance program when it comes to potential fires.



Recently members of the JPIA's Risk Control team attended CAJPA's Legislative Committee meeting. The committee discussed how public entities mitigate, prevent, prepare, and respond to wildfires. This is important due to the fact that wildfire visibility and risk have significantly increased in the last decade. [According to Cal Fire's Top 20 Most Destructive California Wildfires report from March 2019, "15 of the 20 most destructive wildfires in the state's history have occurred since 2000; 10 of those 15 have occurred since 2015."]¹

Due to the devastation wildfires have had in California over the years, we need to be pro-active and take the necessary steps to improve the odds of reducing the potential for the loss of property or life with a potential wildfire.

How can an agency be proactive and prevent possible wildfires from starting on their property, or be able to protect against a wildfire in the area? By developing a **sustainable plan** that will help agencies protect against wildfires. Following are examples of procedures agencies can incorporate in the development of a plan:

1. Prepare an Emergency Preparedness Plan developed for wildfires.
2. Be active in your community's warning system(s) (example: County OES, Cal/WARN).
 - a. Build and maintain relationships with local emergency management officials.
 - b. Conduct an annual exercise with the agency's EOC.
3. Have effective procedures for vegetation management, protection of infrastructure, communication plans, and evacuation plans.
4. Have a coordination plan with the local fire department(s).
5. Provide employee training:
 - a. Protection against wildfire smoke [§5141.1 Protection from Wildfire Smoke](#)
 - b. [SEMS/NIMS](#) Emergency Management

[The Water Emergency Response Organization of Orange County (WEROC) developed an [Urban-Wildland Fire Coordination Plan for Water Utilities & Fire Departments](#) template (attached) as a resource for the water industry. The template is designed to help agencies develop emergency plans specific to wildfires. This template was created with lessons learned and best practices from recent wildfires.]²

By using a template, your agency can begin to develop a robust process for protecting against wildfires. [Additional information can be found on the [DHS "Ready" website](#) for preparing and protecting against wildfires. Cal/OSHA requires that employers ensure that employees have a safety workplace that includes [protection against the hazards of wildfires](#).]³

So again we ask ourselves, are we doing everything we can to protect against wildfires? Do we have proper procedures to protect employees and agency assets? By using and implementing these tools, we can begin to effectively protect our districts against wildfires.

Developing any plan can be difficult, but we need to ensure that we do everything we can for our employees and our community. Hopefully, the information provided in this article will make the process easier to begin and eventually have a completed Wildfire Emergency Action Plan. Wildfires are very unpredictable and can happen anywhere. So let's be **proactive and prepared** to ensure the protection of our districts.

References:

1. CAJPA Legis and Loss Control Wildfire Resiliency Communication
2. Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWD OC) – Water Emergency Response Organization of Orange County (WEROC): Emergency Management Resources – Preparedness
3. Department of Homeland Security – Ready website

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