



AB 2380 – Private Firefighters

**SUMMARY**

AB 2380 will require the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL-FIRE) to collaborate on guidelines and regulations governing the operations of private firefighting resources contracted in the state, as well as the use and marking of private firefighting equipment. This will ensure that there is clear differentiation between the contracted resources at an incident and public resources there to serve the public, so that all first responders – public and private – can be safe.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2017, California experienced the largest wildfires in the State’s history. Firefighters from across the State worked to fight these devastating fires, protect homes, and assist residents in the impacted areas. During the Thomas Fire (Ventura and Santa Barbara counties), there was a significant presence of privately contracted fire resources. It was reported that there were 75 private contractors on 41 private engines, and that these contractors and their equipment were “indistinguishable” from that of the public fire agencies.

This use of privately contracted private fire prevention resources is not a new phenomenon. Private fire resources are typically hired by insurers to protect their policyholders’ homes during a wildfire disaster. However, without knowing this information or being able to clearly identify the *public vs private* resources, residents can be confused about why some resources focus only on certain homes and areas.

During the wildfires in 2007 and 2008, there were several reports of private teams working around the State. This similarly sparked confusion and questions regarding how private resources interact with state and local resources. In response, FIRESCOPE (Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies) developed *Private Resource Utilization Guidelines*<sup>1</sup> to provide private fire prevention contractors with recommendations about how to best coordinate with incident command, heed warnings and evacuations, and ensure they are working together with first responders. In addition, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) also issued *Guidelines for Managing Private Resources*<sup>2</sup>, which are consistent with those developed by FIRESCOPE.

The devastation that took place in the fall of 2017 only highlights the increasing risk of major wildfires in our state

caused by climate change, extreme weather, and recent droughts. California must work to ensure that its system of emergency response is fine-tuned to enable the best firefighting and mutual aid systems for any and all emergency situations in the future.

**THIS BILL**

AB 2380 requires our state’s experts from OES and CAL-FIRE establish standards for privately contracted firefighting resources that balance the important rights of home and landowners with the broader interests of local public safety. This bill sets the FIRESCOPE and IAFC guidelines about coordinating, communicating, and identifying privately contracted fire resources as baselines in the law. The guidelines would include requirements that privately contracted private fire prevention resources:

- Heed all evacuation warnings and leave the evacuation area when prompted;
- Register with incident command;
- Be equipped with GPS tracking;
- Identify a liaison to communicate with incident command at all times;
- Monitor incident command radio frequencies; and,
- Focus on pre-fire treatment and non-emergency activities outside of a restricted area to ensure safety and control and minimize potential liability issues.

Regulations for private fire prevention equipment would include requirements that:

- All equipment be clearly labeled “non-emergency;”
- Emergency vehicles do not use lights or sirens; and,
- Prohibit labeling that indicates “emergency personnel” or “fire department.”

The public presumes a heightened level of training service provided by California’s first responders. Wildfire incidents require not only expert firefighting tactical skills, but also medical aid, search and rescue, and other types of emergency response. Precious seconds could be lost if a member of the public in distress becomes confused and seeks emergency services and support from a privately contracted resource that is simply present on the incident in a fire prevention capacity. By developing regulations, AB 2380 will put an end to confusion and strengthen emergency aid to benefit all Californians.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.firescope.org/reference-materials/wildland/FIRESCOPE-private-resource-utilization-guide.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1assoc/iafcposition-wildlandresourceutilizationguidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=bc0cd80d\\_0&download=true](https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1assoc/iafcposition-wildlandresourceutilizationguidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=bc0cd80d_0&download=true)