



California Is Not Adequately Prepared to Protect Its Most Vulnerable Residents From Natural Disasters

EMERGENCY PLANNING

Background

Although the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) is responsible for the State's emergency management system and disaster response services, local governments are primarily responsible for emergency preparedness and response. Local governments may request assistance from the next level up in the emergency management system when a natural disaster exceeds their capacity to manage it. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) manages the federal emergency response which applies to all levels of government, including cities, counties, and state. We reviewed the emergency planning for residents with access and functional needs at three counties that had recent wildfires. Under state law, people with access and functional needs include older adults and people with disabilities, chronic conditions, and limited English proficiency.

Our Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should require Cal OES to do the following:
 - » Review counties' emergency plans to ensure they align with best practices.
 - » Involve organizations that represent individuals with access and functional needs in developing state emergency plans and guidance for local jurisdictions.
 - » Annually distribute lessons learned from natural disasters.
- Cal OES should issue the required guidance related to access and functional needs to local jurisdictions.
- Counties should fully prepare to protect all their residents during a natural disaster by aligning their emergency plans with best practices for alerting, evacuating, and sheltering all residents including vulnerable populations.

Key Findings

- Despite available guidance for emergency planning for people with access and functional needs from FEMA, Cal OES, and other disaster response entities, the three counties we reviewed are not adequately prepared to protect vulnerable residents during natural disasters.
 - » Although the demographics of each community have a profound effect on emergency response functions, such as evacuation and sheltering, none of the counties had assessed their respective populations to determine what access and functional needs existed in their communities.
 - » None of the counties prearranged transportation agreements for evacuation assistance or sent critical warning messages in multiple languages, and two counties did not use wireless emergency alerts designed to reach all cell phones.
 - » None of the counties have complete or up-to-date plans for key emergency functions such as plans to alert, evacuate, and shelter their residents—two counties did not have plans for issuing alerts and warnings and evacuating residents, while the county that did have plans for these key emergency functions had not updated these plans since 2011.
- Cal OES has not done enough to fulfill its mission to protect lives and support communities' abilities to withstand and recover from natural disasters.
 - » It has not issued required guidance related to identifying people with access and functional needs and to evacuating those populations during a natural disaster.
 - » It has not involved people with access and functional needs in creating key planning and guidance documents.
 - » It has not created and disseminated timely after action reports to share lessons learned from recent disasters that would help local jurisdictions' planning efforts.