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**AB-275 Office of Emergency Services: wildfire aerial response program.** (2025-2026)

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AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 23, 2025

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 13, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

**ASSEMBLY BILL**

**NO. 275**

Introduced by Assembly Member Petrie-Norris

January 21, 2025

An act to add Article 24 (commencing with Section 8669.9) to Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code, relating to ~~emergency response~~ *fire safety*.

**LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST**

AB 275, as amended, Petrie-Norris. Office of Emergency Services: wildfire ~~response~~ *SoCal Edison-funded helitanker program*; *aerial response program*.

Existing law, the California Emergency Services Act, establishes the Office of Emergency Services in the office of the Governor, with specified powers and duties relative to coordinating emergency services. Existing law requires the Office of Emergency Services to enter into a joint powers agreement with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to develop and administer a comprehensive wildfire mitigation program, as specified.

~~Existing law requires electrical corporations to construct, maintain, and operate their electrical lines and equipment in a manner that will minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfire posed by those electrical lines and equipment. Existing law requires an electrical corporation to develop, adopt, and update an emergency and disaster preparedness plan and a wildfire mitigation plan, as specified.~~

This bill would require the Office of Emergency ~~Services~~ *Services, in consultation with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection*, to establish, on or before December 31, 2026, a working group to ~~study the feasibility of making the SoCal Edison-funded Quick Reaction Force firefighting helitanker program permanent in statute~~ *evaluate and develop recommendations for implementing a wildfire aerial response program to provide year-round, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, rapid aerial suppression capabilities. The bill would require the working group to consider specified elements to ensure effective statewide aerial wildfire suppression and to develop recommendations, including whether the program should be implemented as a pilot program, a full-scale statewide initiative, or if implementation is not recommended based on feasibility findings*. The bill would require the Director of Emergency ~~Services~~ *Services, in consultation with the department*, to appoint members to the working

group who are ~~knowledgeable about the program. The bill would make related findings and declarations:~~ *familiar with wildfire aviation response programs, as provided. The bill would require the working group to report its findings and implementation recommendations to the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management and the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization on or before December 31, 2027, as provided.*

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

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## THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

### ~~SECTION 1.~~(a) ~~The Legislature finds and declares both of the following:~~

~~(1) Since 2020, the SoCal Edison-funded Quick Reaction Force (QRF) has positively demonstrated its ability to protect lives, property, and infrastructure.~~

~~(2) The fire agencies within the fifteen counties that SoCal Edison serves have come to depend on the QRF program to respond to wildfires across Southern California.~~

~~(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation to make the QRF firefighting helitanker program permanent and maintained by the Office of Emergency Services.~~

**SEC. 2.****SECTION 1.** Article 24 (commencing with Section 8669.9) is added to Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code, to read:

#### Article 24. ~~Quick Reaction Force Firefighting Helitanker Program~~ **Wildfire Aerial Response Program**

**8669.9.** (a) The Office of Emergency ~~Services~~ *Services, in consultation with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection*, shall establish, on or before December 31, 2026, a working group to ~~research the feasibility of making the SoCal Edison-funded Quick Reaction Force firefighting helitanker program permanent in statute.~~ *evaluate and develop recommendations for implementing a wildfire aerial response program to provide year-round, 24 hours per day, seven days per week, rapid aerial suppression capabilities. It is the intent of the Legislature that the wildfire aerial response program be available to local fire agencies upon request to enhance wildfire response efforts.*

(b) *The working group shall consider a wildfire aerial response program that includes, but is not limited to, the following elements to ensure effective statewide aerial wildfire suppression:*

*(1) A fleet of firefighting aircraft capable of rapid aerial suppression, including night operations.*

*(2) A reconnaissance aircraft equipped with night vision and infrared technology to provide real-time aerial intelligence, enhance incident command decisionmaking and guide suppression efforts.*

*(3) A mobile retardant base capable of supporting sustained aerial firefighting operations.*

*(4) Support personnel necessary to ensure continuous operational readiness, including, but not limited to, mechanics, logistics staff, and relief pilots.*

(c) *The working group shall develop recommendations, including, but not limited to, recommendations on the following topics:*

*(1) Cost-sharing and operational models, including, but not limited to, a structure where the local fire agencies lease aircraft and provide operational control and staffing with requesting fire departments responsible for operational costs when deployed and when the state assumes responsibility for standby costs associated with the fleet, mobile retardant base, and helicopter coordination services.*

*(2) Protocols for local fire agencies to request deployment of program resources, ensuring rapid mobilization during high-risk wildfire events and equitable distribution based on regional wildfire risk, incident severity, and mutual aid priorities.*

*(3) The division and staging of resources to maximize efficiency and coverage.*

*(4) The strategic placement of resources to ensure effective statewide response capabilities.*

*(5) Whether the program should be implemented as a pilot program, a full-scale statewide initiative, or if implementation is not recommended based on feasibility findings.*

(d) *The inclusion of the elements listed in subdivisions (b) and (c) shall be evaluated for feasibility and effectiveness, and shall not be construed as a mandatory requirement for subsequent program design.*

~~(b)~~

(e) The Director of Emergency ~~Services~~ *Services, in consultation with the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection,* shall appoint members to the working group who are ~~knowledgeable about the SoCal Edison-funded Quick Reaction Force firefighting helitanker program;~~ *familiar with wildfire aviation response programs, including, but not limited to, representatives from county fire departments, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and the Office of Emergency Services.*

(f) (1) *The working group shall report its findings and implementation recommendations, including feasibility analysis, cost projections, and deployment strategies, to the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management and the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization on or before December 31, 2027. The report required to be submitted pursuant to this section shall be submitted pursuant to Section 9795.*

(2) *The requirement for submitting a report imposed pursuant to this subdivision is inoperative on December 31, 2031, pursuant to Section 10231.5.*