



CALIFORNIA FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

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Update on USFS Reimbursement Policy Under CFAA

On April 25, a coalition of CalChiefs, California Metro Chiefs, Fire Districts Association of California and League of California Cities Fire Chiefs Department sent a [letter](#) to the United States Forest Service (USFS) objecting to unilateral, mid-contract changes to its reimbursement protocols for local agencies under the California Fire Assistance Agreement (CFAA).

As expressed in the letter, our organizations do not oppose holding discussions with USFS over how reimbursement protocols could be revised to ensure the process is fair, accountable and transparent. However, we have urged USFS to incorporate such discussions into negotiations over a successor contract and strongly objected to USFS imposing such drastic changes into the existing agreement that expires on December 31 of this year.

Additionally, we cautioned USFS against attempting to enter into direct agreements with local agencies for reimbursement. In our view, such a strategy conflicts with the operation of our Mutual Aid System as an integrated, unified system for deployment of local agency resources to assist in wildfire and other major disasters, whether they be in a neighboring community, on state lands or on federal lands. One agreement between USFS and Cal OES should apply to all local agency participants in California's Master Mutual Aid Agreement.

Regrettably, USFS is moving forward without negotiation over changes to the CFAA to demand that local agencies 1) comply with its new, additional reimbursement protocols, 2) utilize its new procurement system, and 3) enter into direct agreements.

CalChiefs urges our members to be unified in challenging these demands from USFS for the following reasons:

1. There is an existing CFAA in place for the remainder of 2019 that establishes the requirements for local agencies to receive reimbursement. Public safety services provided to the federal government under that agreement should be reimbursed according existing requirements.
2. The proper forum for any changes to reimbursement protocols is a renegotiation of the CFAA. That negotiations team includes members from Cal OES, Cal Fire, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Parks Service and US Forest Service.
3. A single multiparty agreement between the various agencies listed above covering participants in the Master Mutual Aid Agreement will ensure timely, coordinated response to major wildfires on federal lands and consistent reimbursement to local agencies.

"To strengthen and advocate for the California Fire Service through leadership, unity and collaboration."

If you have questions about this matter, please email our President, Jeff Meston at jeff.meston@calchiefs.org. We are committed to working through these issues with the USFS so we can continue our many decades of partnership to protect lives, property and the environment when wildfires strike federal lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Meston".

Jeff Meston
President