



# 2017 Northern California Wildfires

# HELPING HANDBOOK

A Resource for Individuals, Families, and Small Businesses

# HELPING HANDBOOK

## FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY THE 2017 NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

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This handbook provides an overview of some of the issues that individuals, families, and small businesses may face as a result of the wildfires that swept Northern California in October 2017. Please note that this handbook is current through October 20, 2017 — but by the time you read this material, the federal, state, and county governments may have enacted additional measures to assist victims of the fires that may affect some of the information we present.

This handbook will not answer all of your questions. It is designed to set out some of the issues you may need to consider, to help you understand the basics about each issue, and to point you in the right direction for help. Much of the information in this handbook is general, and you may have to contact federal, state, city, county officials, or local aid organizations to obtain more specific information about issues in your particular area.

You may feel overwhelmed when considering the legal issues you face, and you may find it helpful or even necessary to obtain an attorney's assistance. These feelings are normal. Legal issues are often complicated, and it is prudent to seek advice from an attorney about your questions and the specifics of your situation before acting precipitously. If you do not have an attorney, legal advice and referrals are available to those in need, some at no charge. To help you get started, this handbook includes a list of lawyer referral agencies and several legal aid providers. See **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.

Morrison & Foerster LLP has made the contents of this handbook available for general information purposes only. Although we hope it will be helpful by providing background material, we do not warrant that it is accurate or complete, particularly since circumstances may change after this handbook is posted on the web or published. The handbook is general in nature, and may not apply to particular factual or legal circumstances. In any event, the handbook does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied on as legal advice. Morrison & Foerster LLP renders legal advice only after compliance with certain procedures and when it is legally and ethically permissible to do so. Readers acting on any information contained in this handbook are urged to seek tailored advice from their own legal counsel; if a reader cannot afford counsel, referrals to pro bono counsel may be obtained from the organizations listed in the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.

There is no cost for using or copying these resources. They were compiled to help the people and organizations affected by the wildfires. Reproduction or distribution of these materials for commercial purposes without prior written permission is strictly prohibited. This handbook can be viewed online or printed in both English and Spanish (forthcoming) at [www.mofo.com/norcal-fires/](http://www.mofo.com/norcal-fires/). If an organization with which you are affiliated would like to request printed copies of the handbook, please email [firehandbook@mofo.com](mailto:firehandbook@mofo.com).

We are grateful to Morningside Translations for donating its services to translate this handbook into Spanish.

Finally, we would like to thank the Bay Area Resilience Collaborative for its support and for the planning it has undertaken to improve the coordination of legal services in the aftermath of disasters such as this. More information about the Collaborative can be found here: <https://www.acbanet.org/volunteer-legal-services/bay-area-resilience-collaborative/>.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
HOUSING.....	1
TEMPORARY HOUSING.....	1
HOUSING PAYMENTS.....	2
RENTERS .....	2
REPLACEMENT OF POSSESSIONS .....	4
DEMOLITION AND CLEAN UP .....	4
REPAIR AND REBUILDING .....	5
PURCHASE AND SALE OF DAMAGED PROPERTY .....	8
PROPERTY TAXES.....	8
EMPLOYMENT .....	10
GETTING PAID.....	10
TIME OFF AND THE RIGHT TO RETURN .....	10
HEALTH BENEFITS .....	12
OTHER BENEFITS.....	13
LOSING YOUR JOB .....	13
UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS .....	14
FINDING WORK .....	15
INSURANCE .....	18
UNDERSTANDING YOUR INSURANCE COVERAGE .....	18
NOTIFYING YOUR CARRIER AND NAVIGATING THE CLAIMS PROCESS .....	19
ACCESSING RESOURCES AND KEY CONTACTS .....	20
FEMA .....	23
OVERVIEW.....	23
ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS .....	24
STATE SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT PROGRAM INFORMATION.....	27
SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE .....	28
OVERVIEW.....	28
HOME AND PERSONAL PROPERTY LOANS.....	30
BUSINESS PHYSICAL DISASTER LOANS.....	32
ECONOMIC INJURY DISASTER LOANS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES .....	33
BUSINESS INTERRUPTION.....	36
CONTRACTS.....	36
REAL ESTATE.....	38
TAX RELIEF.....	40
EMPLOYMENT .....	41
PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES .....	47
DEALING WITH CREDITORS, BANKS, AND CASH NEEDS .....	47

## HOUSING

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS .....	49
TAXES .....	51
ADJUSTMENTS TO REGULAR GOVERNMENT BENEFITS .....	54
SOCIAL SECURITY .....	54
UNEMPLOYMENT .....	54
ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER (EBT) CARDS .....	54
FOOD STAMP (CALFRESH) RECIPIENTS .....	54
CALWORKS RECIPIENTS .....	55
VETERANS' BENEFITS .....	55
IMMIGRATION .....	56
ELIGIBILITY FOR RELIEF .....	56
LOST DOCUMENTATION .....	56
INTERACTION WITH USCIS .....	57
DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT .....	59
INTERNET & TELEPHONE RESOURCES .....	64
PUBLIC SAFETY NEWS AND INFORMATION .....	64
TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES .....	64
INTERNET SERVICES .....	65
CONSUMER TIPS & FRAUD PREVENTION .....	66
LOSS OF LIFE .....	70
PROPERTY TRANSFERS; WILLS AND PROBATE .....	70
GUARDIANSHIPS OF MINORS AND INCOMPETENT ADULTS .....	71
TAXES FOR MISSING OR DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS .....	72
PETS & ANIMALS .....	74
LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICES & LEGAL AID .....	78
DISASTER HELP CENTERS .....	81
DISASTER RECOVERY CENTERS .....	81
LOCAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS .....	81
STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY QUICK PHONE LIST .....	82
OTHER RESOURCES .....	84

## HOUSING

### TEMPORARY HOUSING

**My primary residence (house, condominium, or apartment) was destroyed by the wildfires. Although I have been able to stay in shelters or with friends and family, I need temporary housing of my own. Can anyone help me find temporary housing or help pay for it?**

One or more of several different programs or entities should be able to help you in these circumstances. First, various charitable organizations such as the American Red Cross may be able to provide assistance. Contact information for the Red Cross is available on its website, <http://www.redcross.org/contact-us/>. Second, if you have homeowners or renters insurance, temporary housing may be covered by your policy. Contact your insurance agent. Third, as discussed below, the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) has several programs that may be able to assist you.

#### Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) Program

FEMA's TSA Program provides short-term lodging assistance for evacuees with a continuing need for shelter because they are unable to return to their homes for an extended period of time after the original shelters have closed. Under the TSA Program, you may be eligible to stay in a hotel or motel for a limited period of time and have the cost of the room and taxes covered by FEMA. FEMA does not cover the cost of incidental room charges or amenities such as telephone, room service, and food.

For those who are eligible, FEMA will authorize and fund the use of participating hotels and motels (through direct payments to the hotel and motel) as transitional shelters. The initial period of assistance will be 5 to 14 days from the date of TSA implementation. If needed, FEMA, in conjunction with the state, may extend this period of assistance. Those interested in TSA should register with FEMA for assistance. You can determine eligibility online at <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> or by calling (800)621-3362. You can search for an eligible hotel at <http://www.femaevachotels.com/> or visit <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> and click on the "Transitional Sheltering Assistance Hotel Locator."

#### Rental Assistance through Individuals & Households Program (IHP)

IHP provides tax-free grants (Rental Assistance) to households displaced from their primary residence by a federally declared disaster such as the wildfires. These need-based grants enable homeowners and renters to secure temporary housing while repairs are made to their pre-disaster primary residence or while transitioning to new permanent housing. Rental Assistance may be used to rent a house, apartment, manufactured home, recreational vehicle, or other readily fabricated dwelling. To be eligible for Rental Assistance, the following conditions must be met:

- you have losses in a presidentially declared disaster area;
- you have no insurance, or your insurance claim has been denied, or your insurance settlement does not cover all of your losses;
- you or someone who lives with you is a U.S. citizen, a non-citizen national, or a "qualified alien" (see Immigration chapter);
- the affected home is where you usually live and where you were living at the time of the disaster; and
- you are not able to live in your home now, you cannot get to your home, or your home requires repairs because of disaster damage.

Only one application will be accepted from each household (generally, all people living in one apartment or house). (See additional information about IHP resources for rebuilding your residence below in the **Repair and Rebuilding** section of this chapter.) Apply online for assistance at <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> or call the FEMA helpline at (800)621-3362.

#### Government-Provided Temporary Housing

If FEMA determines there is no rental housing available in the local community due to the disaster, it may provide Government-Provided Temporary Housing (e.g., modular or mobile homes) to disaster victims. As of October 20, we have not been able to confirm whether FEMA will be providing this type of housing in response to these wildfires.

Separate from FEMA assistance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) may offer Section 8 rental assistance and relocation plans for tenants in subsidized public housing. Aid also may be provided through California's

## HOUSING

State Supplemental Grant Program (SSGP). See the **Adjustments to Regular Government Benefits** chapter of this handbook for more information.

If you were living in a Rural Development-financed apartment and have been displaced, you may be eligible for additional assistance from the USDA Rural Development Agency. For further information about this benefit, call (800)414-1226.

### **My primary residence was damaged during the wildfires. If I move out while repairs are being made, can I get any assistance in finding and paying for temporary housing?**

Depending on the amount of damage, you may be eligible for assistance. Potential sources include charitable organizations, your insurance, and FEMA's IHP, discussed above.

### **During the wildfires I was ordered to evacuate my primary residence. Instead of going to one of the local shelters, I rented a room in a motel. Can I obtain reimbursement for the money I spent on the motel room? What if my primary residence was neither damaged nor destroyed as a result of the wildfires?**

You may be eligible for assistance from charitable organizations, your insurance, or FEMA. FEMA provides lodging expense reimbursement for hotels, motels, or other short-term lodging while an applicant is displaced from his or her primary residence. You should save your receipts and document your expenses in case you are able to file for reimbursement. (The same disaster assistance process described above will apply to determine your eligibility relative to FEMA's potential reimbursement.)

## HOUSING PAYMENTS

### **My primary residence, which I own, was destroyed by the wildfires. Am I obligated to continue paying my mortgage, homeowners association fees, insurance, etc. on that residence? Does it make a difference if my residence was only damaged rather than destroyed?**

Unless you obtain a forbearance agreement from your lender, you should continue to pay your mortgage regardless of whether your residence was destroyed or damaged. You should contact your mortgage servicer (the company where you send your monthly payments) to discuss possible mortgage relief options. If you are having trouble contacting your mortgage servicer, contact the Homeowner's HOPE Hotline at (888) 995-4673 for assistance.

If your loan is owned by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, you may be eligible to temporarily stop making your monthly mortgage payments for three month intervals up to 12 months. You can check to see if Fannie Mae owns your loan at <https://www.knowyouroptions.com/loanlookup> or by calling (800)232-6643; you can check to see if Freddie Mac owns your loan at <https://www3.freddie.com/loanlookup/> or by calling (800)373-3343 and selecting option #2.

If (i) your residence has suffered substantial uncompensated disaster damage (40% or more of the original property value), (ii) you intend to repair the damage or rebuild, and (iii) you do not have sufficient credit available elsewhere to cover your mortgage payments, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) may be able to refinance all or part of your outstanding mortgage which could result in a reduced monthly mortgage payment. See the **SBA Loan Assistance** chapter of this handbook for more information.

If your home loan is through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), you might be able to have it adjusted. Call the VA regional office where the property is located. The proper regional office should be identified on the loan papers. If the papers are not available, call the VA at (877)827-3702 for the number of the correct regional office. You can also speak with a loan specialist about your options by calling the VA at this number.

With regard to homeowners association fees or insurance premiums, you should review the language of your association's bylaws and the insurance policy. It is likely in your best interest to pay the amounts owed unless you obtain written confirmation that you do not have to pay or may defer payment for a specific time.

## RENTERS

***The following is only general information for tenants regarding premises damaged by the wildfires. Individual circumstances will vary. For many of these questions, you may want to contact an attorney. If you do not have an attorney, consult the Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid chapter of this handbook.***

### **If my rental unit has been damaged or destroyed, what issues do I need to consider?**

- Do you have a written lease?

## HOUSING

- How badly is the rental unit damaged?
- Do you want to keep possession of the apartment, move out temporarily while the landlord makes repairs, or move out permanently?
- Is the unit rent-controlled or subsidized?

### **What if I have a written lease?**

Your rights will be determined by the lease's provisions to the extent they are not superseded by California law. Although "form" leases are commonly used, the provisions covering disasters vary significantly even for different leases in the same building. You should ask a professional to check the provisions of your lease to answer these questions for you.

### **How do I assess the damage to my rental unit?**

Under California law, landlords must maintain rental units in habitable condition. A residential tenant cannot be forced to waive his or her right to habitable premises. Unless you have a unique lease that you negotiated with your landlord, this information about habitability most likely applies to your rental unit. To be considered habitable, the rental units must substantially satisfy *all* of the following conditions:

- roof and exterior walls must be waterproof;
- windows and doors must be unbroken;
- plumbing and gas systems must be in good working order;
- hot and cold running water must be provided;
- sewage disposal systems must be operational;
- heating equipment must be in good working order;
- electrical lighting and wiring must be maintained in good working order; and
- floors, stairways, and railings must be kept in good repair.

### **If my rental unit is damaged, what can I do if I have a month-to-month rental agreement and want to move permanently?**

You can give one month's notice to your landlord and then move. If the unit is substantially damaged (damaged to the extent the premises can no longer be used as a residence), you may not need to give a full month's notice. In that case, see the guidelines below.

### **If my rental unit is damaged, do I have to pay rent if I have a one-year lease and I want to move out permanently?**

Under California law, you may terminate your tenancy and not pay rent if the unit is substantially damaged. If you want to terminate your tenancy, you should:

- check your lease for applicable provisions;
- make a list of the unit's impaired and damaged conditions;
- obtain FEMA inspection reports;
- request a local city building inspection and obtain a certified copy of the inspection report;
- photograph the damage and record the date the picture was taken, who took the picture, and the subject of the picture; and
- have the unit and building viewed by reliable witnesses and record the date of the viewing and what the witness saw.

Assuming these efforts lead you to conclude that your unit is substantially damaged, write a letter to your landlord, enclose copies of the documentation set forth above, state that the rental unit is not habitable, and state that you consider the lease terminated. Sign and date the letter and keep a copy for your records. You then will be in a position to proceed as if the unit had been destroyed. If your landlord disputes your position and you have not done so already, you should promptly consult an attorney or seek the services at a legal aid organization.

### **Can I terminate my lease if my rental unit is materially damaged?**

You must first notify the landlord about the needed repairs and give the landlord a reasonable time to make the repairs. If the landlord does not make the repairs within a reasonable time, then you may be able to terminate the lease. The landlord may dispute whether the repairs are necessary and whether a reasonable time was given to make the repairs, in which case you may need to contact an attorney or seek the services at a legal aid organization.

## HOUSING

### REPLACEMENT OF POSSESSIONS

**When the wildfires destroyed my residence, I lost almost all of my personal possessions. Can anyone help me obtain replacement clothes and necessities? What about replacing my television, computer, etc.?**

You should be able to replace personal property that was destroyed with insurance proceeds and grants or loans from several federal or state programs.

First, if you have homeowners insurance or renters insurance, the policies typically include provisions for the replacement of personal property subject to various conditions and policy limitations. If you were renting your primary residence, you should find out if your landlord named you as an additional insured on the landlord's policy, in which event it may provide benefits for you.

Second, the SBA may provide a Home and Personal Property Loan for possessions (up to \$40,000) to both homeowners and renters. The amount the SBA can loan depends on the actual cost of repairing or replacing the damaged items less insurance recovery, grants, etc. The loan can be used to repair or replace personal property such as clothes, furniture, automobiles, and consumer electronics — but an SBA loan cannot be used to replace luxury or extraordinarily expensive items such as personal pleasure boats, airplanes, RVs, and fur coats, or to pay for upgrades or make additions to the home unless required by building codes. Property such as antiques or collections of rare goods that may have market values in excess of their functional value are covered only for the amount of their functional value. (For example, reimbursement for a collection of four rare quarters would be \$1.00, not the potential price at a coin show.) See the **SBA Loan Assistance** chapter of this handbook for more information.

Third, to the extent your personal property losses exceed the amount of your insurance coverage and SBA loans, and assuming other conditions are met, FEMA will sometimes provide disaster victims with assistance in replacing furniture lost when their primary residence was destroyed. If you need such assistance, you should specifically request assistance for furniture costs from FEMA and show that you have a need. See the **FEMA** chapter of this handbook for further information.

### DEMOLITION AND CLEAN UP

**Do I need a permit to demolish a residence partially destroyed by fire or to clean up debris from my property that resulted from the fire?**

Homeowners are advised **not** to conduct their own demolition of partially burned structures or perform debris or ash removal. These activities may present serious health risks due to the presence of asbestos, lead, and other hazardous materials. Homeowners may be eligible for programs sponsored by CalRecycle or other agencies to complete demolition and debris removal at no cost. If you move or spread the fire debris, you may lose your eligibility or become liable to others. We recommend that you wait until state assistance is in place to sign up for these programs. You will then need to sign a "Right of Entry" form granting permission to the responsible agency to access and clean up the property.

If you nevertheless undertake demolition, note that, in general, demolition permits are required from your local city or (for unincorporated areas) county government before removing major structures. These permitting requirements may be relaxed and/or expedited for structures affected by the wildfires. Check with your local permitting jurisdiction for requirements before conducting any structural demolition work.

If you nevertheless undertake debris removal, be sure to wear appropriate protective clothing including face masks, gloves, and eye protection. You may be required to submit plans and obtain a permit from your local permitting jurisdiction for removal of building debris and ash and soil sampling may be required to test for hazardous substances. The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has stated that immediate efforts to clean up ash, charred debris, and other contaminated materials from burned residential structures are exempt from hazardous waste permit requirements. This exemption does not apply to long-term restoration activities. Check with the DTSC for more information and advice regarding your specific situation. You can contact DTSC at <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/> or (916)255-6504.

**Am I required to send any debris I clean up to a special collection facility?**

Much of the debris likely includes materials that must be properly disposed of to avoid soil or water contamination. Solid waste landfill operators may be granted special emergency waivers to accept debris they would not otherwise be allowed to accept. To the extent hazardous materials cannot be separated from other burned materials (as is likely in a burned residential structure), they may be accepted along with other debris at municipal landfills. Household hazardous materials



## HOUSING

(e.g., paints, fertilizers, automotive fluids, batteries, and electronic waste) that can be separated from other burned materials should be taken to a local household hazardous waste collector. The following website contains a list of household hazardous waste collection facilities: <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/HHW.cfm>.

### REPAIR AND REBUILDING

**My primary residence, which I own, was destroyed by the wildfires. Who can help me have it rebuilt? If my residence was not insured, or the insurance turns out to be insufficient, are there any programs that might help me rebuild?**

As with other types of assistance, you should first look to insurance proceeds and charitable donations to cover the costs of rebuilding and repair. To the extent you were uninsured or underinsured, the SBA, FEMA or the state may be able to help. For more information, see the **SBA Loan Assistance**, **FEMA**, and **Adjustments to Regular Government Benefits** chapters of this handbook.

**My primary residence, which I own, was destroyed by the wildfires. Will I need a permit to rebuild it?**

As a general rule, a building permit is required whenever structural work is involved or when the basic living area of a home is to be changed. This could include separate permits for roofing, electrical, heating, and plumbing. Typically, the contractor overseeing the rebuilding/repair will obtain the necessary building permits from the city or county building or planning department. See rebuilding and repair contact information for fire-affected areas below. In addition to building permits, depending on the zoning requirements in place for your residence, you may need to obtain zoning approval as well.

Following natural disasters, various cities and counties may contemplate special treatment for building permit and zoning applications submitted by wildfire victims (for instance, providing plan review and issuing building permits on an expedited basis, and at no cost for anyone whose home has been destroyed by fire). Make sure to ask or have your contractor ask about any special building permit programs available for wildfire victims.

See the following contacts for rebuilding/repair information for the fire-affected areas below.

#### **City of Santa Rosa**

Building Division: (707) 543-3200, Ext. 1, <https://srcity.org/262/Building-Division>

#### **Butte County**

Development Services: (530) 538-7601, <https://www.buttecounty.net/dds/building.aspx>

#### **Lake County**

Community Development: (707) 263-2382,  
[http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Community\\_Development.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Community_Development.htm)

#### **Mendocino County**

Planning & Building Services: (707) 234-6650, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/planning-building-services>

#### **Napa County**

Planning, Building & Environmental Services: (707) 253-4417, <http://www.countyofnapa.org/PBES/>

#### **Nevada County**

Building Department: (530) 265-1222, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1114/Building-Department>

#### **Solano County**

Building & Safety Services: (707) 784-6765, <https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/buildingnsafety/default.asp>

#### **Sonoma County**

Permit & Resource Management: (707) 565-1900, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Permit-and-Resource-Management/>

#### **Yuba County**

Building Department: (530) 749-5440, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Community%20Development/Building/>

## HOUSING

### **What happens if I do not get a building permit?**

If the authorities learn you have undertaken repairs or rebuilding without obtaining a necessary permit, you will generally pay a fine and may be ordered to tear down any construction that was done without authorization. The amount of the fine varies by jurisdiction. If you sell your property, you are required by law to disclose work that has been done without the required permits and that could lower the sale price or jeopardize the sale of your property altogether.

### **My former house was built before the current building codes were in place. When rebuilding, do I have to conform to the new building codes?**

Houses must generally be constructed according to the codes in effect at the time the reconstruction permit is issued. Some cities and counties may not require conformance to new building codes for repairs are considered “minor.” You should check your insurance policy or call your insurance carrier to determine whether your homeowner's policy provides for upgrades to the current building code. Some policies do not pay for building code upgrades.

If the local government's zoning requirements have changed for your property since the house was built, you will generally be required to conform to the new zoning rules. This could affect the size or design of the house and in some cases may affect the allowable uses of the property. Be sure to check with your local planning department.

### **Is it a good idea to be my own general contractor?**

Unless you are very experienced in the construction business, no. As an owner/builder, you assume responsibility for the overall job, which may include responsibility for state and federal taxes, workers' compensation insurance, and other requirements and liabilities.

### **If I'm not my own contractor, how will I know which contractor to hire?**

If possible, use only contractors referred to you by someone you know and trust. Unscrupulous contractors may try to solicit work from you, offering to repair or rebuild your home for a low price. Remember, if something seems “too good to be true” it probably is. Although you may be anxious to get things back to normal, avoid acting too quickly. Take time to determine exactly what you want done and make sure the contractor is licensed and reputable and can address all of your concerns. If possible, get at least three competitive bids based on the same set of specifications before making your decision. Beware of door-to-door offers of repair services and never provide the contractor with a cash deposit on a handshake. You should get a written contract that details every aspect of the work to be done and a performance and payment schedule. Before signing a contract with a contractor, be sure to check his or her license status and references. And read the information in the **Consumer Tips & Fraud Prevention** chapter of this handbook.

### **Must a contractor be licensed?**

State law requires that contractors working on any job requiring \$500 or more of work be licensed by the California Contractors State License Board (CSLB). Ask to see the contractor's license (called a “pocket license”) that has the CSLB's license number on it (state contractors' licenses are solely numeric; no alphabetic characters are included in them), as well as an additional form of identification for verification (the contractor's license should be in the contractor's own name). You can verify a contractor's license status at the CSLB website, <http://www.cslb.ca.gov/> or by calling CSLB's toll-free automated telephone system (800) 321-2752. The CSLB has a hotline for disaster victims, (800) 962-1125 (weekdays only).

### **Do I need a written contract?**

State law requires that home improvement contracts for \$500 or more in labor or materials must be in writing. Anything you sign can be considered a contract or otherwise used by a contractor as authorization to go forward with a project — so do not sign anything until you completely understand what it is.

### **Can I change my mind after I sign the contract?**

If your residence is within a federally, state, or locally declared emergency area, California law allows you to cancel a contract for repair of a residence damaged by the disaster within seven business days of signing the contract. For other contracts, you may cancel within three business days of signing, provided the contract was solicited some place other than the contractor's place of business (such as in your own home). By law, the contractor must give you written notice of this right to cancel.

## HOUSING

### **How much can a contractor require as a down payment?**

California law limits the amount of the down payment for any home improvement contract (including debris removal) to the lesser of \$1,000 or 10% of the contract price, excluding finance charges. Except for this down payment, California law prohibits a contractor from collecting payment for work that has not been performed or materials that have not been delivered. As a general rule, you should not make cash payments to contractors.

### **How can I make sure the work progresses as scheduled in the contract?**

A contract should provide a description of the work to be done, the time period which it is to be done (including the date on which “substantial commencement of work” should occur), the materials to be used, and the equipment to be used or installed. Contractors often ask for progress payments as the work progresses. California law requires that the contract must specify all of the work that is to be completed before a progress payment is due, and that the progress payment cannot exceed the value of the work performed and materials purchased up to that point. It is customary to make the last payment a “retention” payment, ordinarily 10%, which you retain until the job is completed and the city and county has approved all work.

### **What happens when the contractor uses subcontractors or suppliers?**

You should protect yourself from liens against your property in the event the contractor does not pay the subcontractors or suppliers. California’s Mechanics’ Lien Law allows those who furnish labor or materials to your home to record a lien against your property if they are not paid even if you have paid your general contractor in accordance with the contract. At its most extreme, a lien may result in the forced sale of your property if you are unable to pay the amount of the lien. At the very least, a lien will make your property more difficult to finance or sell.

California law requires the contractor to provide you with a “Mechanics’ Lien Warning.” That warning suggests measures you can take to prevent liens against your home, such as:

- getting a list from your contractor of all subcontractors and material suppliers and monitoring when they start work or deliver materials;
- paying close attention to any “Preliminary Notice” received from a subcontractor, which provides notice that the person has a right to record a lien if not paid; and
- if permitted by your contract with the general contractor, paying with a joint check, payable to both the contractor and the subcontractor or material supplier.

The law provides that contractors, on request, must furnish an unconditional release of potential mechanics’ lien claims once you have made payment to the subcontractor for that specific work or materials. Note that the general contractor can also place a lien on your house if you fail to pay for his or her services.

### **What if my contractor doesn’t perform the work I contracted for, or does a poor job?**

If you have a dispute with a contractor that you are not able to resolve on your own, you may contact CSLB to file a complaint against the contractor. You can find more information online at <http://www.cslb.ca.gov/> or by calling (800) 321-2752. Depending on the nature and severity of the complaint, and whether the contractor is licensed or unlicensed, CSLB may direct the parties to a dispute resolution program, investigate potential violations of law, or pursue legal action against the contractor.

### **What effect does an arbitration clause have in my contract?**

By agreeing to arbitrate, you are agreeing to have a dispute with your contractor decided by a neutral third party (known as the arbitrator) rather than by a judge or jury (unless the arbitration is non-binding). Some consumers prefer arbitration to court proceedings because arbitration is usually less expensive. But if you proceed with binding arbitration, you waive almost all grounds for seeking review of the arbitrator’s decision in court; in almost all circumstances, the arbitrator’s decision will be the final decision, even if you think the arbitrator made a mistake of fact or law.

### **What is the effect of a clause allowing the contractor to recover attorney’s fees and costs from me if there is a dispute?**

In California, in a legal dispute about a contract, each side pays its own attorney’s fees and costs, but that arrangement may be overridden in a written contract. An attorney’s fees clause written for the contractor means that, if the contractor prevails in a dispute in arbitration or in court, you will have to pay the contractor’s attorney’s fees and costs. California law provides a reciprocal benefit with regard to attorney’s fee clauses — meaning that if you are the prevailing party, you may recover your attorney’s fees and costs even if the clause does not specifically provide that you are entitled to do so.

## HOUSING

**A man who said he was a contractor offered to clean up my property, assess the damage to it for the purpose of obtaining grants and loans, and rebuild my house for \$50,000, with just \$5,000 down. Fortunately, I have the money available. Should I hire him?**

You should pause, not feel pressured, and then proceed only with the utmost caution. Before hiring anyone as a contractor or other service provider in connection with damage to or destruction of your property, you should take care to be an “aware consumer.” As discussed above, if a person represents himself as a contractor, you should ask for references from prior jobs and obtain his contractor’s license number and check that it is valid, including checking for valid photo identification. Most entities and programs that will provide property owners with funds to rebuild or replace damaged property have their own inspection and assessment programs. As a result, unless the funding entity instructs you otherwise, you need not hire a private person or firm to perform an inspection of your property as part of the application process.

**Although my primary residence, which I own, was not destroyed during the wildfires, it was damaged and is no longer habitable. Can I get any assistance to repair my house or mobile home?**

Yes. In addition to charitable grants, loans, or insurance proceeds, FEMA and the SBA may be able to help you with repairs.

FEMA, through its IHP, provides grants to homeowners to repair damage from the disaster that is not covered by insurance. The goal is to repair the home so it is in a safe and sanitary condition, which may not return a home to its condition before the disaster. These grants are available only when a disaster has been declared and individual assistance has been authorized. As of October 20, 2017, the maximum assistance available to an individual or household under the IHP is \$34,000.

If you apply for IHP, FEMA will inspect your home and base the amount of its grant on the reasonable cost of repairs to the damaged property. Repairs covered by IHP include:

- structural parts of a home (foundation, outside walls, and roof);
- windows, doors, floors, walls, ceilings, and cabinetry;
- septic or sewage system;
- well or other water system;
- heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems;
- utilities (electrical, plumbing, and gas systems); and
- home entrances and exits, including privately owned access roads.

If you own a mobile home and it is your primary residence, IHP will cover repair costs related to blocking, leveling, and anchoring the mobile home.

If your home needs more extensive repairs than FEMA will fund, the SBA may be able to help with a Home and Personal Property Loan. For more information, see the **SBA Loan Assistance** and **FEMA** chapters of this handbook.

## PURCHASE AND SALE OF DAMAGED PROPERTY

**Prior to the wildfires, I had agreed to purchase a residence/real property that was subsequently destroyed by the wildfires. Must I complete the purchase?**

It depends on what the terms of the purchase agreement state and whether title to, or possession of, the property passed prior to the destruction of the property. If title to the property has already passed and you were the owner as of the date of destruction, you may be eligible for assistance from your insurer or from the various sources of aid identified in this handbook. Otherwise, barring contrary language in your purchase and sale agreement, the Uniform Vendor and Purchaser Risk Act, Civil Code section 1662 allows a purchaser to back out of an agreement for the sale of real property if “all or a material part” of the property was destroyed prior to the transfer of title or possession. If you face this situation, you may want to obtain the advice of a real estate attorney to assist you.

## PROPERTY TAXES

**My property was damaged in the wildfires. Can I obtain a reduction in my property tax assessment?**

If the damage to your property exceeds \$10,000, you may obtain a reduced tax assessment as of the date of the fire to reflect the damage. However, unless you qualify for the tax payment deferral described below, you must continue to pay

## HOUSING

your taxes as billed and obtain a refund later once the property has been reassessed to reflect the damage. To qualify, you must file an application for an assessment reduction within 12 months of when your property experienced the damage (unless extended by the county). A list of County Assessors' offices appears below. (Note: Upon restoration, your property will be taxed using its original Proposition 13 base year value as adjusted for time and improvements that expand the size or improve the quality of the damaged property.)

### **If I choose not to rebuild, can I purchase or construct another replacement property and continue to enjoy my original Proposition 13 base year value?**

Possibly. You may purchase or construct another replacement property in your same county if your original property suffered a decline in value of more than 50% in either the improvements or the land. The replacement property must be similar in size, utility, and function, and purchased within five years from date of damage. If the value of the replacement property is 120% or less of the value of original property prior to damage, you will continue to be taxed based on the Proposition 13 base year value of the original property. To the extent the replacement property exceeds 120% of the value of the original property, the excess will be added to your original base year value.

### **Do I have to continue to pay my property taxes prior to receiving a lower assessment to reflect the damage caused by the wildfires?**

If your damage exceeds \$10,000 and you have not yet paid your 2017-18 property taxes, you may file a claim for tax deferment with your County Assessor which may defer those taxes until 30 days after you receive a corrected bill. You should confirm this with your County Assessor's office when you file for the deferment. Otherwise, you must continue to pay your property taxes as billed. (Note that property taxes that are impounded and paid pursuant to an agreement with your lender do not qualify for deferment.)

### **Do these provisions also apply to manufactured (mobile) homes?**

In general, these provisions only apply to locally assessed manufactured homes. However, in the case of manufactured homes that are replacements for manufactured homes that have been *completely destroyed*, owners who pay a registration fee to Sacramento in lieu of local property taxes may qualify and/or be transferred to local property assessment with a value that does not increase the taxes currently paid through the state fees.

Applications for assessment reduction and deferment of taxes as well as additional information may be obtained by contacting your County Assessor:

#### **Butte County** (<https://www.buttecounty.net/>)

Assessor: (530) 538-7721, <http://www.buttecounty.net/assessor/>

#### **Lake County** (<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/>)

Assessor: (707) 263-2302, <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm>

#### **Mendocino County** (<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/>)

Assessor: (707) 234-6800, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/assessor-county-clerk-recorder-elections/assessor-services-forms>

#### **Napa County** (<http://countyofnapa.org/>)

Assessor: (707) 253-4466, <http://countyofnapa.org/Assessor/>

#### **Nevada County** (<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/>)

Assessor: (530) 265-1232, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/163/Assessor>

#### **Solano County** (<http://www.solanocounty.com/>)

Assessor: (707) 784-6210, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ar/>

#### **Sonoma County** (<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/>)

Assessor: (707) 565-1888, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Assessor/>

#### **Yuba County** (<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/>)

Assessor: (530) 749-7820, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Assessor/>

## EMPLOYMENT

The answers to each of the following questions are based on the assumption that the affected employees are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement and do not have an employment contract with their employer. In the event there is a collective bargaining agreement or an employment contract, the employee should consult the terms of those agreements and contracts. Similarly, if the employer has established employment policies, the employee should review those policies to see if they provide additional benefits or rights.

The answers below address situations in general and it may be advisable to obtain further advice from human resource professionals or attorneys when dealing with a specific situation, particularly if difficulties are anticipated or arise.

### GETTING PAID

#### **If my employer's payroll records were destroyed, when should I expect to receive my paycheck?**

The State of California requires timely payment of wages pursuant to applicable wage-and-hour laws. If records of working hours are not available, the employee should work with his or her employer to make a reasonable effort to determine the hours he or she worked during the applicable pay period and promptly render the appropriate payment.

#### **Does my employer have to pay me for the days the business was closed as a result of the wildfires?**

The answer to this question depends in part on whether you are considered an "exempt" employee or a "non-exempt" employee for purposes of federal and state wage-and-hour laws, and whether or not you performed work for your employer during the pay period in question. In general, an employer is not required to pay its non-exempt employees for any days or hours the non-exempt employees did not work because the business was closed due to the wildfires. On the other hand, an exempt employee should receive his or her full salary for any workweek in which he or she performed any work without regard to the number of days or hours worked. (So, for example, if you are an exempt employee and you worked on the morning of Sunday, October 15, 2017, but worked no other days during the week of October 15, 2017, then your employer should pay you your full salary for the week of October 15, 2017.)

### TIME OFF AND THE RIGHT TO RETURN

#### **Can my employer require me to use my accrued vacation, PTO, or sick leave to cover my absence from work due to the wildfires?**

If you are unable to report to work due to something related to the wildfires, your employer may require you to use your accrued vacation or PTO and may allow you to use sick leave to cover your absences as long as this is consistent with the employer's leave policies. You should consult your employer if you believe your absence may qualify as leave under the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or its California counterpart, the California Family Rights Act (CFRA), or pregnancy disability leave under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), or to see if your employer is offering any other leave or assistance during this time. These types of leave are discussed in further detail below.

#### **Does my employer have to provide me with either paid or unpaid leave if I am unable to work as a result of an injury suffered during the wildfires?**

An employer may be required to provide you with unpaid leave: (1) under the FMLA or CFRA if you or a member of your immediate family is suffering from a serious health condition; (2) under the FEHA for pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or (3) under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the FEHA if you are disabled and if the granting of leave would serve as a reasonable accommodation to your disability.

**Leave Under the FMLA and CFRA.** The FMLA and CFRA provide that a covered employee may take up to a total of 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for certain qualifying reasons. During the leave period, the employer must maintain the employee's health benefits and must guarantee that the employee will be reinstated to the same or an equivalent position. FMLA and CFRA leave is unpaid, unless your employer has elected to pay employees during such leave or requires or permits you to use vacation, PTO, or sick leave. As described below, you may also be eligible to receive disability benefits under the California State Disability Insurance (SDI) program during a qualifying FMLA or CFRA leave.

The FMLA and CFRA apply to only those employers that employ 50 or more employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year. An employee is entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave if the employee: (1) has been with the employer for at least 12 months; (2) logged at least 1,250 hours of service

## EMPLOYMENT

during the 12-month period immediately preceding the start of the leave; and (3) is employed at a worksite where 50 or more employees are employed by the employer or within 75 miles of that worksite. FMLA or CFRA leave may be taken to care for the employee's spouse, registered domestic partner, child, or parent, or the employee's spouse or registered domestic partner's child or parent with a serious health condition, or because of the employee's serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the functions of the employee's position.

For more information regarding compliance with the FMLA, check the following website:

<https://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/APPENDIXF.htm>.

For more information regarding compliance with the CFRA, check the following website:

<https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/resources/frequently-asked-questions/employment-faqs/pregnancy-disability-leave-faqs/pdl-cfra-fmla-guide/>.

**Pregnancy-Related Leave Under the FEHA.** Under the FEHA, employers with five or more employees must allow female employees to take up to four months of leave for periods of disability due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. The employee may elect to use accrued vacation leave, and may be required to substitute sick leave or any other accrued leave which is made available by the employer to temporarily disabled employees. Pregnancy-related leave under the FEHA is unpaid, unless your employer has elected to pay employees during such leave. The employer must continue to provide the same benefits or privileges of employment granted by that employer to other employees.

As described below, you may also be eligible to receive disability benefits under the California SDI program during a qualifying pregnancy-related leave.

For more information regarding the FEHA, check the following website: <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2017/06/CAamendedFEHAreqsEmployers20160401Final.pdf>.

**Leave Under the ADA and FEHA.** Under certain circumstances, an employer may be required to provide an employee with leave under the ADA or FEHA. The ADA and FEHA require employers, in certain circumstances, to provide reasonable accommodations to employees who have a disability. Such a reasonable accommodation may include providing an employee with an unpaid or paid leave of absence.

The FEHA generally provides broader protections than its federal counterpart, the ADA. Though the ADA applies to only those employers that employ 15 or more employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year, FEHA applies to employers with five or more employees. In addition, under the ADA, an employee is "disabled" if the employee has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a "major life activity" of an individual, including activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, sitting, standing, lifting, or reaching, whereas under FEHA, an employee is "disabled" if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that limits a "major life activity." Generally, temporary impairments are not considered protected disabilities.

### **Am I entitled to either paid or unpaid leave so that I can care for children or family members injured in the wildfires?**

As described above, you may be entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave, which you can use to care for children or family members injured in the wildfires. If you are entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave as described above, then your employer must allow you to take FMLA or CFRA leave. This leave is unpaid, unless your employer has elected to pay employees during such leave or requires or permits you to use vacation, PTO, or sick leave. You may also be eligible to receive benefits under the California Paid Family Leave (CPFL) program during a qualifying FMLA or CFRA leave if your leave is taken to care for a seriously ill family member. Also, if your employer has a specific policy providing for leave under such circumstances, the employer will be required to comply with its policy.

For more information regarding the CPFL program, check the following website:

[http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid\\_Family\\_Leave.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid_Family_Leave.htm).

### **Am I entitled to either paid or unpaid leave if I am too afraid or emotionally traumatized to return to work?**

If you are suffering from post-traumatic stress or some other mental condition, your employer may be required to provide you with unpaid leave under the FMLA or CFRA or as an accommodation under the ADA or FEHA. However, you will have to meet the applicable requirements of these laws, as discussed above. You may be required to provide your employer with medical certification of your need for leave in accordance with applicable law. The leave will be unpaid,

## EMPLOYMENT

although you should be able to use any accrued vacation, PTO, or sick leave for the absence. As described below, you may also be eligible to receive disability benefits under the California SDI program.

### **If I become ill or injured because of the wildfires and cannot return to work, what benefits can I apply for?**

You should first check with your employer regarding any benefits your employer provides, including any short-term or long-term disability insurance coverage. You may also be eligible for disability benefits under the SDI program, a partial wage-replacement insurance plan funded through employee payroll deductions. Most California workers are covered under SDI, but some are exempt, including railroad employees, some employees of non-profit agencies, employees who claim religious exemptions, and most government employees. Covered workers who are unable to work can receive approximately 55% of their lost wages for up to one year.

Alternatively, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits or Disaster Unemployment Assistance, though you may not be eligible for SDI benefits if you are claiming or receiving unemployment insurance benefits or Disaster Unemployment Assistance. See the **Unemployment** section of this chapter for more information.

### **Am I eligible for SDI benefits?**

SDI benefits can be paid only after you meet all of the following requirements:

- you are unable to do your regular or customary work for at least eight days;
- you were employed or actively looking for work at the time you became disabled;
- you have lost wages because of your disability and you earned at least \$300 during your base period, from which SDI deductions were withheld;
- you are under the care and treatment of a licensed physician/practitioner or accredited religious practitioner during the first eight days of your disability (and must remain under care and treatment to continue receiving benefits); and
- your physician/practitioner completes the medical certification of your disability.

For further information, please check: [http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Am\\_I\\_Eligible\\_for\\_DI\\_Benefits.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Am_I_Eligible_for_DI_Benefits.htm).

### **How do I file a claim for SDI benefits?**

You must submit a claim online or complete and mail a claim form within 49 days of the date you became disabled or you may lose benefits. Filing a disability insurance claim online at [http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/SDI\\_Online.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/SDI_Online.htm) is the preferred method. A claim form may be obtained from the California Employment Development Department (EDD) at the website [http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/How\\_to\\_File\\_a\\_DI\\_Claim\\_by\\_Mail.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/How_to_File_a_DI_Claim_by_Mail.htm) or by calling (800) 480-3287 (English), (866) 658-8846 (Spanish), or (800) 563-2441 (TTY). A completed claim form, including a doctor's certification of your disability, should be mailed to the following address:

State of California  
Employment Development Department  
P.O. Box 989777  
West Sacramento, CA 95798

## HEALTH BENEFITS

### **I was injured or became ill as a result of the wildfires and cannot return to work. Can I continue my health insurance?**

Most California employers are required to offer employees the ability to continue their medical coverage at their own cost for up to 36 months. This coverage is generally referred to as Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) coverage. Normally, you must make an election to continue the coverage within 60 days after the date your coverage terminates as a result of your termination of employment.

### **What rights do I have to health coverage under COBRA?**

Employers who have 20 or more employees and maintain health plans are required by federal law to offer continuing medical coverage to qualified beneficiaries (participating employees and/or their dependents) who lose health coverage due to a "qualifying event" such as the death of the covered employee, termination of his or her employment, or reduction



## EMPLOYMENT

of his or her hours sufficient to cause the loss of medical coverage. However, employees must pay for this medical coverage themselves.

Smaller employers (with 2 to 19 employees) that maintain health plans but are not covered under COBRA are required by California's Continuation Benefits Replacement Act (Cal-COBRA) law to provide COBRA-like coverage to their eligible employees. Like COBRA, Cal-COBRA requires employees to pay for this medical coverage themselves.

### **Can my family members keep their health insurance coverage?**

Your dependents can also elect COBRA coverage at their own cost if they were previously covered by your health plan during your employment. Their maximum coverage period is 36 months.

### **What can my employer do to help me recover psychologically from the trauma of the wildfires? Are there any counseling services available to people affected by the wildfires?**

Your employer's health plan may offer counseling to you and your dependents. In addition, some employers may provide assistance under employee assistance programs (EAPs). You should ask your employer about the availability of such counseling, both for yourself and your family, if that would be helpful. If you are a veteran, you may seek assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs online at [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) or by calling the Veterans Crisis Line (800) 273-8255 (press 1). Otherwise, you may seek help from a mental health agency in the county in which you live, either permanently or temporarily.

In addition, the National Disaster Distress Hotline, staffed by trained mental health counselors, is available to help those coping with the emotional consequences of the wildfires. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at (800) 985-5990 or by texting "talkwithus" (or, for Spanish, "hablanos") to 66746.

## OTHER BENEFITS

### **Am I entitled to other benefits if I was injured or became ill as a result of the wildfires, and I was working at the time I was injured or became ill?**

You may be eligible to receive workers' compensation benefits to provide you with the medical treatment you need to recover from your work-related injury or illness, and replace lost wages if you were working at the time you were injured or became ill. You will need to file a workers' compensation claim with your employer. You should contact your employer immediately if you believe you have sustained a workplace injury or illness.

### **I'm not eligible for workers' compensation. Are there other benefits available?**

If you are employed but were not at work at the time you were injured or became ill, you may be entitled to short-term or long-term disability insurance payments. Check with your employer and personal insurance agent to find out what coverage is available to you. Your employer may also provide benefits for specific injuries such as loss of a limb under an accidental death or dismemberment policy. If you have been injured, you should inquire about this coverage as well.

Emergency loans against the cash value of some life insurance policies may also be available. Contact your agent, employer, or insurance company to learn more.

## LOSING YOUR JOB

### **I have lost my job due to the wildfires. Is unemployment insurance or disaster insurance available?**

If you have become unemployed due to a disaster or emergency, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, which are administered by California's Employee Development Department (EDD). For more information, please refer to the EDD's resource page on filing a claim ([http://www.edd.ca.gov/unemployment/Filing\\_a\\_Claim.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/unemployment/Filing_a_Claim.htm)). In addition, because the wildfires have been declared a national disaster, you may be eligible to receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits if you have become unemployed due to the wildfires and you do not qualify for regular UI benefits (for example, because you are self-employed or you are an agricultural worker who does not meet the UI earnings requirement). Applicants for DUA must also be federally authorized to work. For more information, please refer to the EDD's fact sheet on DUA benefits ([http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf\\_pub\\_ctr/de8714y.pdf](http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf_pub_ctr/de8714y.pdf)). For additional information on both UI and DUA, please read the **Unemployment Benefits** section of this chapter.

## EMPLOYMENT

### **Does my employer have to provide its employees with any prior notice of termination if the employer determines that it is necessary to lay off employees?**

Probably not; advance notice requirements generally do not apply in the event of natural disasters such as the wildfires.

### **Does my employer have to provide me with severance pay if I am laid off?**

There is no law that requires severance pay. However, if your employer has an established severance pay practice or plan, you may be eligible for severance pay.

### **Can I be reimbursed by my employer for the destruction or loss of any of my personal items, such as personal computers or cars that I may have used for business purposes?**

Generally speaking, your employer is not responsible for your loss of personal property. You should consult with your employer and your own insurance company to determine whether loss of your personal property is covered by any applicable insurance policy.

### **Because my employer's offices were destroyed, I will be working from home. Is there any information I should know?**

You should assume that the same laws, requirements, and rights apply at your temporary work location as would apply if you were in your usual work location. If you are non-exempt, you should keep track of the hours you work. You should also keep track of any business expenses you incur, as you may be eligible for reimbursement from your employer.

## UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

### **I lost my job or cannot work because of the wildfires. Am I eligible for unemployment benefits?**

You may be eligible for either: (i) unemployment insurance benefits or (ii) Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

### **What are unemployment insurance benefits?**

Unemployment insurance provides temporary income for workers who are unable to work through no fault of their own. Unemployment insurance benefits are paid weekly, and the amount of the weekly payments is generally based on a worker's earnings in the prior calendar year. In order to be eligible, you must be able to work, be seeking work, be willing to accept a suitable job, and be federally authorized to work, in addition to meeting other criteria.

### **How do I file a claim for unemployment insurance?**

Unemployment insurance claims are filed with the California EDD. Claims may be filed by calling (800) 300-5616 (English), (800) 326-8937 (Spanish), (800) 547-3506 (Cantonese), (866) 303-0706 (Mandarin), (800) 547-2058 (Vietnamese), or (800) 815-9387 (TTY), Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. – noon, except holidays. Claims also may be filed online at <https://eapply4ui.edd.ca.gov/>.

You will need the following information to file a claim:

- your Social Security number, mailing and residence addresses (if different), and telephone number;
- the last date you worked for any employer (if you are working part-time be sure to state that you are still working and provide the number of hours you work each week);
- the reason you are no longer working for your last employer (e.g., you were laid off or terminated due to the closing of a business as a result of the wildfires or you were terminated because you had to move out of the area as a result of the wildfires);
- the name, mailing address, physical location, and telephone number of your last employer (note that an incorrect address may delay benefit payments);
- information on all employers you worked for during the 18 months prior to filing your claim, including each employer's name, your period of employment, wages earned, and how you were paid;
- the name of the employer you worked for the longest within the last year and a half; and the number of years you worked for that employer (this may or may not be the same as your last employer);
- your driver's license or ID card number, if you have either;
- whether you are receiving, or expect to receive, any payments from a former employer (severance pay is not deducted from unemployment insurance benefits and does not affect your eligibility to receive benefits but must be reported);
- whether you are able to work and are available to accept work; and

## EMPLOYMENT

- whether you have a legal right to work in the United States, which may include providing your alien registration number.

### What Is Disaster Unemployment Assistance?

Disaster Unemployment Assistance is a federal program that provides financial assistance to workers, including the self-employed and certain agricultural workers, who become unemployed as a direct result of a major natural disaster such as the wildfires. Eligible persons will receive weekly payments, which are calculated in the same manner as for unemployment insurance benefits (described above). The minimum weekly benefit amount payable is half of the average benefit amount in California.

### Am I eligible to receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance?

You generally will be eligible to receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance if (1) you are an unemployed worker or self-employed individual; (2) you are federally authorized to work; (3) you lived, worked, or were scheduled to work in the wildfires area; and (4) as a direct result of the wildfires, you:

- are not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits (described above) **AND:**
- no longer have a job or a place to work;
- cannot reach your place of work;
- cannot work due to damage to your place of work;
- cannot work because of an injury caused by the wildfires (including mental stress, if documented by a doctor); or
- have become the breadwinner or major support for a household after the head of the household died as a result of the disaster.

### For how long a time period can I receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance?

Disaster Unemployment Assistance benefits are payable for up to 26 weeks. The period during which benefits are payable begins on the first day of the week following the date of the disaster and ends 26 weeks after the date the disaster was declared. In other words, you may be eligible for assistance during the period beginning on October 15, 2017, and ending the week of April 8, 2018. You may receive assistance for as long as you remain unemployed during this period. You must accept any suitable jobs offered and must conduct a job search while receiving assistance.

### How do I file a claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance?

Claims for Disaster Unemployment Assistance can be filed by telephone or online. You can contact the EDD at (800) 300-5616 (English), (800) 326-8937 (Spanish), (800) 547-3506 (Cantonese), (866) 303-0706 (Mandarin), (800) 547-2058 (Vietnamese), or (800) 815-9387 (TTY), Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. – noon, except holidays. Claims can also be filed online at <https://eapply4ui.edd.ca.gov/>. You must file your claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance within 30 days of the announcement of the disaster declaration. According to a press release issued by the EDD on October 17, 2017, **you must file your claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance by November 16, 2017.** Late applications are accepted only in certain limited circumstances. See the EDD's press release at [http://www.edd.ca.gov/About\\_EDD/pdf/nwsrel17-37.pdf](http://www.edd.ca.gov/About_EDD/pdf/nwsrel17-37.pdf) for more information on how to file a claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance and what documentation must be submitted to receive benefits.

## FINDING WORK

### I lost my job because of the wildfires and need assistance finding a job. Who should I contact?

For information on job search assistance, online job listings, workshops, and other employment and training services, contact your local EDD America's Job Center of California location. The following is a list of some EDD America's Job Center of California locations in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Solano, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties. A complete list of EDD America's Job Center of California locations can be found on EDD's website at [http://www.americasjobcenter.ca.gov/Job\\_Center\\_Locator.aspx](http://www.americasjobcenter.ca.gov/Job_Center_Locator.aspx).

## EMPLOYMENT

### Butte

Oroville One-Stop Employment Center (Butte Co. Dept. of Employment & Social Services)  
78 Table Mountain Blvd.  
Oroville, CA 95965  
Phone: (530) 538-7301  
Fax: (530) 534-1167  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.butteonestop.org](http://www.butteonestop.org)

Butte Community Employment Center  
2445 Carmichael Dr.  
Chico, CA 95928  
Phone: 530-895-4364  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.afwd.org](http://www.afwd.org)

### Lake

CareerPoint Lake  
55 First Street, Suite 114  
Lakeport, CA 95453  
Phone: (707) 263-0630  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (closed noon – 1:00 p.m.)  
[www.workforcelake.org](http://www.workforcelake.org)

CareerPoint Lake – Clearlake  
15880 Dam Road Extension, Building 602  
Clearlake, CA 95422  
Phone: (707) 998-8591  
Hours: Tuesday – Thursday, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (closed noon – 1:00 p.m.)  
[www.workforcelake.com](http://www.workforcelake.com)

### Mendocino

CareerPoint Mendocino  
631 South Orchard Ave.  
Ukiah, CA 95482  
Phone: (707) 467-5900  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (closed noon – 1:00 p.m.)  
<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/planning-building-services/workforce-investment-board>

CareerPoint Mendocino – Fort Bragg  
1211 Del Mar Dr.  
Fort Bragg, CA 93437  
Phone: (707) 964-3218  
Hours: Monday – Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (closed noon – 1:00 p.m.)  
<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/planning-building-services/workforce-investment-board>

### Napa

CareerPoint Napa/ Workforce Napa  
2751 Napa Valley Corporate Dr., Building A, Room 106  
Napa, CA 94558  
Phone: (707) 253-4134; (800) 464-4214 (toll free); (800) 445-1312 (TTY)  
Fax: (707) 253-4377  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

### Nevada County

Business & Career Network  
988 McCourtney Dr.  
Grass Valley, CA 95949  
Phone: (530) 265-7088  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.afwd.org](http://www.afwd.org)

## EMPLOYMENT

Nevada County Business and Career Network – Truckee  
10075 Levone Ave., Suite 105  
Truckee, CA 96161  
Phone: (530) 550-3015  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.afwd.org](http://www.afwd.org)

### **Solano County**

Solano Employment Connection and EDD  
1440 Marin St.  
Vallejo, CA 94590  
Phone: (707) 648-4024; (800) 735-2922 (TDD line)  
Fax: (707) 645-9856  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.SolanoEmployment.org](http://www.SolanoEmployment.org)

Solano Employment Connection  
320 Campus Lane  
Fairfield, CA 94534  
Phone: (707) 863-3500; (800) 735-2922 (TDD line)  
Fax: (707) 864-3285  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.SolanoEmployment.org](http://www.SolanoEmployment.org)

### **Sonoma County**

Sonoma Job Link  
2227 Capricorn Way, Suite 100  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407  
Phone: (707) 565-5550  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.sonomawib.org](http://www.sonomawib.org)

Santa Rosa – North Bay Workforce Services  
606 Healdsburg Ave.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401  
Phone: (707) 576-2850  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

### **Yuba County**

Yuba County 1-Stop  
1114 Yuba Street, Suite 214  
Marysville, CA 95901  
Phone: (530) 749-4850  
Fax: (530) 749-4858  
Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
[www.yuba1stop.org](http://www.yuba1stop.org)

## INSURANCE

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR INSURANCE COVERAGE

#### **My (real or personal) property was damaged or destroyed during the wildfires. What insurance policies might provide coverage for my loss?**

If your home, personal property, or vehicle has been destroyed or damaged as a result of the wildfires, several different types of policies may provide coverage for your losses. Homeowners, renters, condominium, vehicle, and fire insurance policies could all provide some coverage.

Typical homeowners, renters, and condominium insurance policies cover losses to real and personal property resulting from fire, smoke, wind, theft, riots, vandalism, and water (excluding flood damage). "Comprehensive" vehicle insurance typically covers damage not caused by collision, including damage caused by fire, theft, vandalism, and windstorm. Fire insurance, not surprisingly, specifically covers losses from fire.

#### **What type of property does my policy cover?**

Coverage depends on the type of insurance policy you hold:

- Homeowners insurance normally covers damage to personal property (e.g., furniture, clothes, and appliances), dwellings (e.g., home and other buildings on your premises), and landscaping (on a limited basis), as well as additional living expenses (including food and temporary housing) incurred as the result of a covered loss.
- Renters insurance usually covers the loss of personal property and loss of use of the rented property. It may also include liability and medical payments coverage.
- Condominium insurance usually covers personal property and improvements made to the condominium unit you own. Loss of use is often limited to 40% of the household contents limit. Condominium associations typically purchase insurance for the building structure and common areas, while a condominium owner's individual condominium insurance policy typically covers the interior contents of the condominium unit.
- Comprehensive vehicle insurance ordinarily covers physical damage to the insured vehicle (either cost of repairs or fair market value of the vehicle) not caused by collision, such as damage caused by fire.
- Fire insurance covers the listed real property (dwelling and other buildings on the property) and personal property common to such occupancy. Some policies also provide coverage for debris removal, landscaping, and additional living expenses.

A summary of the coverage types and limits can be found on the declarations page of the policy, while the detailed disclosure regarding coverage limits and scope can be found in the underlying policy documents. Exclusions will be listed in your insurance policy. Therefore, it is important to carefully review your policy to learn which claims are excluded from your particular policy, as well as to understand the applicable deductibles and coverage limits associated with your policy.

#### **I own a small business that was damaged or destroyed during the wildfires. Does my insurance policy provide coverage for my loss?**

If your business has suffered property damage or destruction, including collateral damage or economic loss, which may include loss of business income, extra expenses, computers, valuable records, and data processing material as a result of the wildfires, the evacuations, or other governmental actions related to the wildfires, you may be able to file a claim based on a variety of insurance policies typically held by small businesses. These policies include:

- all risk/all perils policies;
- specific peril policies which cover fire damage;
- business owner property policies;
- computer policies;
- causes of commercial loss policies;
- commercial general liability policies;
- homeowners/renters policies;
- valuable papers and records policies;
- building and personal property policies; and
- umbrella/excess coverage policies.

## INSURANCE

Damage to vehicles such as automobiles, recreational vehicles, mobile homes, or boats may be covered under business or personal automobile policies, motor carrier policies, mobile equipment policies, garage coverage policies, and marine policies. If you or your employees were injured, you or they may be covered by your workers' compensation policy, your or their health insurance policy, or short- or long-term disability policies.

### **My residence was not damaged, but the fire burned the hill above it. Will insurance provide coverage for the steps I have to take to avoid a subsequent landslide or mudslide?**

You should carefully check your policy and speak with your insurance agent to see if there is coverage for this type of damage or preventative repair. (Earth movement, such as landslides and mudslides, are typically excluded from standard homeowners and business insurance policies.) An attorney or other qualified professional may be able to assist you in reviewing the language of your policy. If your policy does not provide coverage for landslides or mudslides, you may want to consider purchasing a flood insurance or a "difference in conditions" policy, which typically offers all-in-one coverage for landslides, mudslides, earthquakes, and floods.

### **Does my insurance policy cover the removal of debris from my property?**

Your homeowners insurance policy may provide coverage for at least a portion of the costs associated with debris removal due to the wildfires. In order to determine whether this is the case for your policy, carefully review the declarations page of your policy and the underlying policy documents. Before clearing the debris, review the **Housing** chapter of this handbook. Make sure to carefully document (videotape or photograph) and itemize recognizable items, as your insurance company may request evidence to validate claims of loss, as discussed in further detail below.

### **My property was not damaged by the fire, but I had to evacuate. Does my insurance policy provide coverage for temporary living expenses?**

Even if your property did not suffer direct damage from the fire, your homeowners, condominium, or renters insurance policy's additional living expense coverage may provide reimbursement of food, temporary housing, pet boarding, and other similar expenses if you had to evacuate as a result of the wildfires. Carefully review your policy to determine if it provides such coverage, and make sure to document costs (e.g., keep copies of receipts and credit card statements) incurred as a result of the evacuation.

## NOTIFYING YOUR CARRIER AND NAVIGATING THE CLAIMS PROCESS

### **How do I make an insurance claim?**

You should contact your insurance agent or insurance company as soon as possible to start the claims process if you have not done so already. Many insurance policies have a one-year statute of limitations, starting from the date of loss. Most insurance carriers have established toll-free telephone numbers to facilitate the claims filing process. A list of these numbers can be found at the end of this chapter.

When dealing with your insurance company, it is important to carefully document every conversation. Be sure to write down the name of the person who you spoke with, the date, and the substance of your call, including the nature and scope of the information that you provide to the insurance company's agent. Confirm all conversations and agreements in writing and note on your correspondence with the agent, if applicable, that the losses you list are only a partial list of your losses and that you will forward additional claims of losses when discovered. Keep a written inventory of all losses. This can help in future dealings with the insurance company.

### **What should I do if my insurance policy is lost or destroyed?**

If your insurance documents were destroyed in the fire, or if you cannot locate your insurance documents for any other reason, do not panic. Call your insurance agent or insurance company. They should have a copy of your policy on file and must provide you with a copy of that policy. If you do not know the name of your insurance company or insurance agent, check with your mortgage lender, your bank, or your auto dealer, as applicable. They may have records of your insurance information. If those options are unavailable, call the California Department of Insurance at (800) 927-4357 (TTY: (800) 482-4833).

### **Are there specific documents I should have to prove my loss?**

The insurance company and/or insurance adjuster (a person professionally trained to assess the damage to your property) will request to examine any evidence you may have to validate claims of loss. Examples of such evidence may include:

## INSURANCE

- pictures (videotape or photograph) taken before and after the property loss;
- an inventory of all property damaged, along with an estimate of its actual cash or replacement cost value;
- records and receipts for all living expenses incurred due to the property loss (including all food, hotel, and staples bought to maintain a normal standard of living); and
- repair estimates obtained from third parties (e.g., contractors and auto mechanics) or receipts for any repairs already completed.

### **My house is uninhabitable. How do I get money now to pay for living expenses, extra transportation costs to and from work or school, storage costs, etc.?**

While assistance may be available from family, friends, and government agencies, additional living expense coverage is often a standard part of most homeowners, condominium, and renters insurance policies, and can provide coverage for hotel or temporary rental fees, food and meal expenses, pet boarding costs, and other similar expenses incurred as a result of a covered event such as a fire. Review your individual policy to determine whether it provides additional living expense coverage and ask your insurance company for an advance on your insurance proceeds. Funds disbursed in the form of an advance will be deducted from the final settlement.

### **For homeowners insurance, what is the difference between “replacement cost value” and “actual cash value” policies?**

“Replacement cost” coverage provides you with money to repair damaged items or replace destroyed items with new items of a similar type. Your policy should give you enough funds to purchase the new items, but it may or may not contain an overall limit. “Actual cash value” coverage provides you with funds necessary to replace the damaged or destroyed item with a similar item. You will likely receive less money from an actual cash value policy than a replacement cost policy because the actual cash value policy takes depreciation (e.g., age and wear and tear) into account.

Under either form of policy, you probably will still have to pay any applicable deductible, unless that requirement is waived by the insurance company, and you may also be subject to an overall limit or cap.

### **If I did not have renters insurance, am I covered under my landlord’s policy?**

You probably are not covered, unless your landlord named you in his or her policy as a “named insured.” It is probably worth asking your landlord to check if you are included in the policy.

### **My insurance company has denied me coverage; what can I do?**

Insurance companies are required to acknowledge receipt of claims, communicate their decisions on claims, and pay claims in a timely manner. In general, insurance companies should acknowledge receipt of your claim within 15 days of receiving notice of your claim and should communicate a decision on the claim within 40 days of receiving your claim, although it can take longer. Payouts should occur within 30 days of your acceptance of the insurance company’s offer.

If coverage is denied, in whole or in part, ask the insurance company to provide you with its reasons in writing, as well as whether it has an appeals process. Contact the Department of Insurance at (800) 927-4357 (TTY: (800) 482-4833) if you feel your claim has been wrongfully denied.

Additionally, you may want to seek help from an attorney or public adjuster, but be aware that their fees will often reduce your total recovery. Before engaging an attorney or public adjuster to assist with your claim, be sure to collect references and compare multiple service providers before signing an engagement letter.

## ACCESSING RESOURCES AND KEY CONTACTS

### **Are insurance companies taking special measures to respond to those affected by the wildfires?**

The California Insurance Commissioner has issued a notice to insurance companies asking them to agree to expedite claims handling procedures for damages claims arising out of the wildfires in order to help victims more rapidly. These expedited claims handling procedures include standard additional living expense advance payments of at least four months for a total loss and an agreement by the insurance companies to accept reduced itemization of contents in wildfire total losses (e.g., allowing a listing of “100 DVDs” instead of requiring a list of specific DVD titles). Further information regarding these expedited claims handling procedures can be found at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/0400-news/0100-press-releases/2017/release106-17.cfm>.



## INSURANCE

While insurance companies are not obligated to follow these expedited procedures, a number of insurance carriers, including Allstate Insurance, Farmers Insurance, Liberty Mutual, State Farm Insurance, and Wawanesa General Insurance, have agreed to participate. You can find out if your insurance company is participating by contacting them or by calling the California Department of Insurance at the numbers listed below.

### How can I contact the Department of Insurance?

The California Department of Insurance can be reached at (800) 927-4357 (TTY: (800) 482-4833) to assist you with insurance-related questions. The CDI also maintains a website at [www.insurance.ca.gov](http://www.insurance.ca.gov), and has established a dedicated page to provide information regarding its response to the wildfires at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/WildfireResources.cfm>.

In addition, the CDI has dispatched team members to each of the following local assistance centers below to assist consumers with their insurance questions and needs regarding the recovery and claims filing process:

*Butte County* (10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.): Bangor Community Center, 7500 Oro Bangor Hwy., Bangor, CA 95914

*Lake County* (11:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.): Clearlake Community Center, 3245 Bowers Ave., Clearlake, CA 95422

*Mendocino County* (9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.): Mendocino College, 1000 Hensley Creek Rd., Building 6220, Ukiah, CA 95482

*Napa County* (9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.): 2751 Napa Valley Corporate Dr., Building A, Napa, CA 94559

*Nevada County* (10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.): 1020 McCourtney Rd., Grass Valley, CA 95949

*Sonoma* (11:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.): Hanna Boys Center, 17000 Arnold Dr., Sonoma, CA 95476

*Sonoma County* (9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.): Press Democrat Building, 427 Mendocino Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95401

*Yuba County* (10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.): Government Center, 915 Eighth St., Marysville, CA 95901

### What is the phone number for my insurance carrier?

Toll-free phone numbers for many of the insurance companies operating in California are as follows:

21st Century .....	(888) 244-6163
Allied .....	(800) 282-1446
Allstate .....	(877) 810-2920
American Modern .....	(800) 375-2075
Arrowhead .....	(800) 333-5553
Auto Club of Northern California (AAA) .....	(800) 922-8228
California Casualty .....	(800) 800-9410
Century National .....	(844) 980-4827
Chubb Group .....	(800) 252-4670
Commerce West (MAPFRE) .....	(800) 244-1545
	(800) 627-3731
CSE Insurance Group .....	(888) 236-5584
Farmers Insurance .....	(800) 435-7764
FIC/Unitrin .....	(888) 253-7834
Fireman's Fund .....	(888) 347-3428
First American Property & Casualty .....	(888) 922-5343
First American Specialty .....	(800) 632-1642
Foremost .....	(800) 527-3907
Golden Eagle Insurance .....	(800) 461-9224
Hartford .....	(800) 624-5578
Liberty Mutual .....	(888) 398-8924
	(800) 225-2467
Mercury Insurance .....	(800) 503-3724
MetLife Auto & Home .....	(844) 569-3607
	(844) 577-4579

## INSURANCE

Nationwide .....	(877) 669-6877
Oregon Mutual .....	(800) 934-3809
Progressive .....	(800) 776-4737
Safeco .....	(800) 332-3226
State Farm .....	(800) 782-8332
Travelers .....	(800) 252-4633
	(800) 238-6225
USAA .....	(800) 531-8722
Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Co. ....	(877) 929-2637

# FEMA

## OVERVIEW

### What is FEMA?

FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which steps in to manage and coordinate many government assistance programs when the president declares a federal disaster area.

On October 10, 2017, President Trump declared Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma, Nevada and Yuba Counties federal disaster areas. Additional counties may be added to this list; for updated information, check here:

<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4344>.

### What does FEMA do?

FEMA is the starting point for obtaining federal financial assistance in the wake of a presidentially designated disaster. The federal resources it coordinates include the Disaster Housing Assistance and Home Repair Assistance Programs, special loans from the Small Business Administration or the Farm Service Agency, special grants from the Cora Brown Fund, or assistance from many other government-run organizations, including those under the umbrella of the Other Needs Assistance (ONA) Program.

FEMA also sponsors crisis counseling; disaster legal services; income tax assistance for filing casualty losses; advisory assistance for veterans' benefits and Social Security matters; and Disaster Unemployment Assistance. At FEMA's local assistance and disaster recovery centers, you can talk directly to representatives of state and volunteer agencies and get help with insurance questions.

### What types of disaster assistance does FEMA help to administer and coordinate?

The Individuals and Households Program (IHP) is a FEMA program providing a range of services to persons in a declared disaster area. The IHP provides money and services to disaster-affected persons whose property has been damaged or destroyed and whose losses are not covered by insurance.

There are several different types of assistance, including various forms of housing assistance:

- **Temporary Housing:** Eligible applicants can receive money to rent a different place to live, or a government-provided housing unit when rental properties are not available.
- **Repair:** Eligible homeowner applicants can receive money to help repair damage from the disaster to their primary residence if it is not covered by insurance. The goal is to make the damaged home safe, sanitary, and functional.
- **Housing Replacement:** Eligible homeowner applicants can receive money to replace their homes destroyed in the disaster if it is not covered by insurance. The goal is to help the homeowner with the cost of replacing the destroyed home.
- **Other Needs Assistance (ONA):** Eligible applicants can receive money to cover necessary expenses and serious needs that cannot be met through other forms of disaster assistance. This assistance may cover repairing/rebuilding personal property, clothing, household items, educational materials, transportation, and medical, dental, and funeral expenses incurred by disaster victims.
- **Cora Brown Fund:** This fund is used for disaster victims who have exhausted all other avenues of assistance but still have unmet needs.

For more information regarding housing assistance, see <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/information/moving-forward>.

### Do I have to repay FEMA for any disaster assistance?

IHP grants do not need to be repaid, but SBA loans (discussed in the **SBA Loan Assistance** chapter of this handbook) must be repaid.

### What is the State Supplemental Grant Program (SSGP)?

The SSGP is a state program that, like IHP, provides financial assistance to victims of declared disasters such as the wildfires. SSGP grants are awarded only for serious needs and necessary expenses directly caused by the disaster. SSGP funds must be spent on the items for which the money is awarded, which items may include rental assistance, housing, personal property, and medical, dental, funeral, transportation, moving, and storage expenses. SSGP funds

## FEMA

may not be spent on items such as business losses, property improvements, landscaping, recreational property, debts, luxury items, cosmetic damages, pets, replacing cash, or food. For additional description of the SSGP program, please visit: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/SSGP45.pdf>

### ELIGIBILITY & APPLICATION QUESTIONS

#### Am I eligible for assistance from FEMA?

If you experienced a loss in one of the seven counties designated as federal disaster areas by the president as a result of the wildfires, you may be eligible for assistance from FEMA. You should register with FEMA as quickly as possible. The various programs that FEMA coordinates have different eligibility criteria, and you can usually receive assistance under only one program at a time. FEMA will determine your eligibility for the various programs after you register.

To be eligible for Housing Assistance, all of the following must be true:

- you have losses in an area that has been declared a disaster area by the president;
- you have filed for insurance benefits and the damage to your property may not be covered by your insurance or your insurance settlement may be insufficient to meet your losses;
- you or someone who lives with you is a citizen of the United States, a non-citizen national, or a “qualified alien”;
- the home in the disaster area is where you usually live and where you were living at the time of the disaster;
- you are not able to live in your home now, you cannot get to your home due to the disaster, or your home requires repairs because of damage from the disaster; and
- you do not have other, adequate rent-free housing you can use (for example, a vacation home or unused rental property).

To be eligible for Other Needs Assistance, all of the following must be true:

- you have losses in an area that has been declared a disaster area by the president;
- you have filed for insurance benefits and the damage to your property may not be covered by your insurance or your insurance settlement may be insufficient to meet your losses;
- you or someone who lives with you is a citizen of the United States, a non-citizen national, or a “qualified alien”;
- you have necessary expenses or serious needs because of the disaster; and
- you have accepted assistance from all other sources for which you are eligible, such as insurance proceeds or Small Business Administration disaster loans.

#### **To receive federal money for repairs or help with housing needs, do I first need to file a claim under any insurance policy I may have?**

Yes. In order to receive federal money or help with housing needs, you must have filed for insurance benefits (if you have insurance) and the damage to your property must not be covered by insurance. You must provide FEMA with a copy of your insurance company’s decision letter to obtain assistance. However, if a decision on your insurance settlement has been delayed longer than 30 days from the time you filed the claim, you may be eligible for an insurance advancement from FEMA. (These funds are considered a loan and must be repaid to FEMA once you receive your settlement from your insurance company.)

#### **How do I register with FEMA?**

The easiest way to register with FEMA is to call (800) 621-FEMA / (800) 621-3362 (TTY: (800) 462-7585). The toll-free telephone numbers are available from 4:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., Monday – Sunday, until further notice. Be prepared to give the FEMA representative the following information:

- Social Security number;
- current and pre-disaster address;
- a telephone number where you can be contacted;
- insurance information;
- total household annual income;
- a routing and account number from your bank (only necessary if you want to have disaster assistance funds transferred directly into your bank account; you may be able to find your bank routing number online at <https://routingnumber.aba.com/default1.aspx>); and

## FEMA

- a description of your losses that were caused by the disaster.

A complete “Application Checklist” is available on the following website: <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/get-assistance/application-checklist>.

You can also register online at [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov) / [www.disasterassistance.gov/es](http://www.disasterassistance.gov/es) (Spanish) or at one of FEMA’s local assistance centers or disaster recovery centers. For information on locations of these centers, see the **Disaster Help Centers** chapter of this handbook or access the following website: <https://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers>. The State of California has also set up local assistance centers; for those locations, follow this link: <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/ICESite/Pages/October-2017-Northern-California-Fires.aspx>.

### How will FEMA process my request for help?

At the time of registration, you will be given a **FEMA Application Number**. This number is very important for referencing your case, so you must keep it handy. It is also a good idea to keep the name of the person who registered you in case any problem with your paperwork arises.

FEMA may then refer you to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), which offers special loans to disaster victims. (Note that some SBA disaster loan programs are not limited to small businesses or business owners.) If you are referred to the SBA, you must complete and send in your SBA loan application, even if you do not think you will qualify for a loan. The SBA serves as a gatekeeper to other government-run programs. Unless you send in your application and fail to qualify for an SBA loan (or a large enough loan to meet your needs), your application will not be passed on to the ONA Programs, and you may not be eligible for additional assistance from other programs.

If you have requested help from FEMA because of damage to your home, FEMA will send an inspector to look at the damage. The FEMA Inspection is free. Do not let anyone charge you for an “inspection service.” Request to see an ID from the inspector and obtain a copy of his or her inspection report. You should be prepared to meet with the inspector on short notice. If you cannot be present, you may designate someone (over the age of 18) to meet the inspector on your behalf. You may be asked, or proactively want, to sign a form authorizing this individual to meet the inspector. (If you or your representative is not available for the inspection, your application may be withdrawn.)

Be prepared to try to provide the inspector with several pieces of information:

- valid identification;
- proof of home ownership or tenancy;
- proof of damages to your primary residence;
- receipts for expenses you have incurred because of the fires; and
- photos of your property before and after the fires.

Proof of home ownership can include the following documents:

- deed or official record, which may be the original deed or deed of trust to the property listing you as the legal owner;
- tax receipts or a property tax bill showing the damaged dwelling and listing you as the responsible party for the assessments;
- mortgage payment book or other mortgage documents (e.g., late payment notice, or foreclosure notice), where your name is listed along with the damaged dwelling address; or
- real property insurance for the damaged dwelling the applicant is occupying, with your name listed as the insured.

Ownership can also be researched by the inspector or applicant on public websites, for example, a county property tax website.

Proof of tenancy can include the following documents:

- current driver’s license showing the address of the damaged dwelling;
- utility bill sent to the damaged dwelling the applicant is occupying with his or her name (or name of co-applicant) for one of the major utilities, such as electricity, gas, or water; or
- first-class government mail sent to you within the last three months at that address.

You will also need to sign the disaster application and a declaration that you are a citizen, a national, a resident alien, or otherwise lawfully present in the U.S. (See the **Immigration** chapter of this handbook for further discussion of these issues.)

## FEMA

The FEMA inspector will complete a report and transmit it to FEMA's National Processing Servicing Center (NPSC). The NPSC will review the information and decide whether you qualify for assistance. (In the interim, the NPSC may ask you for additional records, such as insurance papers, a copy of title, pay stubs, or repair estimates.) FEMA will mail you a notice of its decision.

### **Are there any application deadlines of which I need to be aware?**

Yes. There are important application deadlines that you must meet (unless specifically extended by FEMA), each of which is calculated from the date the president declared the seven counties as disaster areas, October 10, 2017. The following dates represent the earliest calculated deadlines:

- Housing Assistance: **December 9, 2017**
- Home Repair Assistance: **December 9, 2017**
- ONA Programs: **December 9, 2017**
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance: See the **Employment** chapter of this handbook.

To avoid any issues, you should apply as soon as possible. For updates regarding deadlines, check here:

<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4344/updates-blog-and-news>.

### **Can FEMA extend the registration deadline?**

Yes. In addition, FEMA is authorized to accept late registrations for an additional 60 days beyond the standard registration period. However, you should not rely on this; FEMA rules require suitable documentation of the reasons for the delay.

### **How long does it take to get help from FEMA?**

If you have damage to your home or its contents and you are uninsured, or you have suffered damage that is not covered by insurance, a FEMA inspector should contact you within 14 days of applying to set up an appointment to assess your damage.

Typically, within about 10 days after the inspection, if FEMA determines that you qualify for help, you will receive a direct deposit in your bank account or a check in the mail. If FEMA denies your application, you will receive a letter explaining why you were turned down and will be given a chance to appeal the decision. If you were referred to the SBA, you will receive an SBA application, which you must fill out and return in order to be considered for a loan, as well as other types of assistance. If the SBA approves you for a loan, they will contact you. If the SBA finds that you cannot afford a loan, they will automatically refer you to FEMA's IHP for help and FEMA will contact you.

### **If I am denied assistance from FEMA, how long do I have to appeal that decision?**

Appeals from FEMA's decisions regarding the Rental Assistance, Mortgage and Rental Assistance, and Home Repair Assistance Programs are due within 60 days of the date on FEMA's notice of decision.

### **If I have questions about my application or need to change some of the information provided, what should I do?**

Call the FEMA Disaster Helpline at (800) 621-FEMA / (800) 621-3362 (TTY: (800) 462-7585).

### **If it has been more than 12 days since the FEMA inspector's visit and there has been no word from FEMA, what should I do?**

Call the FEMA Disaster Helpline at (800) 621-FEMA / (800) 621-3362 (TTY: (800) 462-7585) to ask about your application. You may also inquire at a Disaster Recovery Center about your application.

### **Where can I find more information about FEMA's programs for wildfire victims?**

If you have questions about FEMA's programs for victims of the wildfires, you may contact FEMA at (800) 621-FEMA / (800) 621-3362. Additionally, if you have Internet access, you can review FEMA's website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), its California wildfire pages at

[https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4344?utm\\_source=hp\\_promo&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_campaign=disaster](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4344?utm_source=hp_promo&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=disaster), and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services page at <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/ICESite/Pages/October-2017-Northern-California-Fires.aspx>.

## FEMA

### STATE SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT PROGRAM INFORMATION

#### **What is the amount of a SSGP grant? Do I have to repay any grant I may receive?**

The maximum SSGP grant is \$10,000, but the average grant is between \$200 and \$2,000. Because it is a grant, and not a loan, you will not have to repay any grant you may receive.

As mentioned above, SSGP is a state program that provides financial assistance to victims of declared disasters.

#### **Am I eligible for a SSGP grant?**

SSGP is a program of last resort. Therefore, to be eligible for SSGP assistance, you must have:

- applied for and received the maximum IHP grant of \$33,300;
- completed a disaster loan application with the SBA;
- made claims for disaster damages against all applicable insurance policies; and
- accepted any available financial assistance offered from other sources such as private and public organizations (e.g., the American Red Cross).

Applications for SSGP assistance are accepted by FEMA for 60 days following the date the president declares a major disaster.

#### **How do I apply for a SSGP grant?**

There is no separate application process for SSGP grants. FEMA will transmit your application to SSGP once you have utilized the maximum amount available under IHP. If you have any questions you should call the California Department of Social Services at (800) 759-6807. Hearing and speech impaired individuals should call (800) 952-8349.

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

### OVERVIEW

#### What is the SBA?

Despite its name, relative to federally declared disaster areas, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is a federal agency that assists homeowners and renters, businesses of all sizes, and private non-profit organizations by providing low-interest, long-term loans to (1) repair or replace real estate, personal property, machinery and equipment, and inventory and business assets that are damaged or destroyed or (2) offset economic injuries.

SBA loans are made for uninsured or otherwise uncompensated disaster losses. The SBA does not duplicate benefits that have already been provided by other governmental agencies or private insurance companies (with the possible exception of insurance proceeds that are required to be applied against outstanding mortgages). However, applying for an SBA loan does not preclude you from applying for and/or receiving assistance from other federal disaster assistance programs that you may be eligible for, such as a FEMA assistance program. See the **FEMA** chapter of this handbook for further information on its programs.

SBA loans are made on a non-discriminatory basis and without regard to an applicant's age. More information about the SBA can be found on its website, <https://www.sba.gov/>, and at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Declarations/ViewDisasterDocument/879> (SBA Fact Sheet on 2017 California Wildfires Disaster (Disaster # CA-00279)).

#### What kinds of loans does the SBA provide?

The SBA provides three types of disaster loans:

1. Home and Personal Property Loan (HPPL): These loans are available for homeowners, renters, and owners of personal property to repair or replace uninsured damage or loss of property for primary residences and personal property owned by the victim of a declared disaster. **The deadline for applying for an HPPL is December 11, 2017** (unless it is extended by the government following the publication of this handbook).
2. Business Physical Disaster Loan (BPDL): These loans are available to businesses, regardless of size, and to non-profit organizations to repair or replace disaster damage or loss of property, including real estate, machinery, equipment, fixtures, inventory, and leasehold improvements as a result of a declared disaster. **The deadline for applying for a BPDL is December 11, 2017** (unless it is extended by the government following the publication of this handbook).
3. Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL): These loans provide working capital to eligible small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, and private non-profit organizations to assist them through the disaster recovery period. They cover financial obligations and operating expenses (as opposed to physical damage) that the small business could have paid if the disaster had not occurred. The loan amount will be based on financial need and actual economic injury regardless of whether the business suffered any property damage. **The deadline for applying for an EIDL is July 12, 2018** (unless it is extended by the government following the publication of this handbook).

#### What does the SBA look for when considering a disaster loan applicant?

There must be reasonable assurance that you can repay your loan based on the SBA's analysis of your credit or your personal or business cash flow, and you must also have satisfactory character. The SBA will not make a loan to you if repayment depends upon the sale of collateral through foreclosure or any other disposition of assets owned by you. The SBA is prohibited by statute from making a loan to you if you are engaged in the production or distribution of any product or service that is considered illegal by the federal government or if it has been determined to be obscene by a court.

#### Are there restrictions on how disaster loans can be used?

You may only use SBA disaster loans to restore or replace a primary residence (including a mobile home used as a primary residence) and personal or business property to pre-disaster condition and, within certain limits, to protect damaged or destroyed real property from future similar disasters. The loan will be made for specific and designated purposes. The SBA requires that you obtain receipts and maintain good records of all loan expenditures as you restore your damaged property and that you keep these receipts and records for three years.



## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

**NOTE:** If SBA loan proceeds are misused, you must immediately repay 1.5 times the proceeds disbursed to you under the loan. You may also face criminal prosecution or civil or administrative action.

### Does the SBA charge any fees for obtaining a disaster loan?

The SBA does not charge fees (whether as points or as closing or servicing fees) for any disaster loan. You will, however, be responsible for the payment of any closing costs owed to third parties with respect to these loans, such as recording fees and title insurance premiums. If your loan is made in participation with a financial institution, the SBA will charge a guarantee fee to the financial institution, which may then recover such guarantee fee from you.

### Is insurance required to get a loan?

The SBA generally requires borrowers to obtain and maintain insurance.

### Should I wait for my insurance settlement before I apply to the SBA?

No. If you have private insurance, you must file a claim with your insurance company before applying for federal assistance; once that claim has been filed, you should then apply for federal assistance. *Do not miss the SBA filing deadline by waiting for an insurance settlement to arrive before applying.* Final insurance information can be added after an insurance settlement payment is received. The SBA can approve a loan for the total replacement cost up to the SBA's lending limits (described below for each type of loan). Once your insurance settles and makes a payment, if there is a duplication of benefits, the SBA will apply those funds as a prepayment to the outstanding balance of your disaster loan.

### What do I need to do before I apply for an SBA loan?

If you are an individual homeowner, a renter, or an owner of personal property looking to apply for an HPPL, you must first register with FEMA and obtain a nine-digit FEMA registration number. To register with FEMA, you or another member of your household (adult or minor) must have a Social Security number and be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or "qualified alien". You can obtain a FEMA registration number by calling FEMA toll free at (800) 621-3362 (TTY: (800) 462-7585), seven days a week from 4:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or by registering online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov), which is the quickest way to register with FEMA. Once you have received a FEMA registration number, you can apply for an HPPL.

All other SBA disaster assistance loans may be applied for directly with the SBA.

### How do I apply for an SBA loan?

There are three ways to apply for an SBA disaster assistance loan:

1. **Online:** You can apply online for all three types of SBA disaster assistance loans. This is the fastest method to receive a decision about loan eligibility. The online application can be accessed at the SBA's secure website at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela>.
2. **By mail:** You also have the option of submitting a paper application by mail. The paper forms can be found at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/PaperForms>. All required forms listed on the website must be signed and dated and returned to: U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Rd., Ft. Worth, TX 76155-2243.
3. **In person:** You may also apply in person at any open FEMA Disaster Recovery Center, where you can receive personal, one-on-one help from an SBA representative. See the **Disaster Help Centers** chapter of this handbook for locations.

Regardless of whether you submit your application online, by mail, or in person, you must also submit a signed and dated IRS Form 4506-T which gives permission to the IRS to provide the SBA with your tax return information. The IRS Form 4506-T must be completed and submitted with each SBA disaster loan application, even if you are not required to file a federal income tax return. This form can be found at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Information/PaperForms>.

If you need assistance in completing the SBA loan, you may call the SBA toll free at (800) 659-2955 (TTY: (800) 877-8339), Monday – Friday, 5:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., email the SBA at [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov), or seek the assistance of SBA loan officers at FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers or at an SBA Disaster Area Office whose locations can be found at <https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/disasteroffices>.

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

### Will the SBA conduct a property inspection?

Yes, for HPPLs and BPDs, after the SBA has reviewed your credit history, it will send an inspector to your property to verify your losses. The SBA inspector will estimate the total physical loss to your disaster-damaged property.

### How soon will I know if I qualify for a loan?

The SBA's goal is to decide on each application within four weeks from the date the SBA receives a complete application (missing information is a major cause of delay). To make a loan, the SBA must finalize the estimate of the cost of repairing the damage, be satisfied that the business or individual can repay the loan, and place reasonable safeguards to help ensure that the loan is repaid.

### What happens if my loan application is denied?

If the SBA denies your loan application, the SBA will notify you in writing and set forth the specific reasons for the denial. You may request reconsideration of your application within six months of the date of the decline notice. After six months, a new loan application is required. If the SBA declines your application a second time, you have the right to appeal in writing to the director of the Disaster Assistance Processing and Disbursement Center (DAPDC). All appeals must be received by the processing center within 30 days of the decline action. Generally, decisions by the director of the DAPDC are final.

Denied SBA loan applicants will be referred to FEMA for disaster assistance.

### What happens if I miss the filing deadline?

It is very important that you do your best not to miss the SBA's filing deadline. Applications received after the filing deadline may be accepted only if the SBA determines that the late filing resulted from substantial causes beyond the applicant's control, such as: serious illness of the applicant; serious illness or death of an immediate family member; late receipt of an application due to disaster-related reasons (e.g., frequent moves, remote location, or lack of normal mail service); applicant was out of the country during a substantial portion of the filing period; damages were hidden and not discovered before the deadline; or other issues during the filing period that prevented the applicant from making a timely filing. When submitting an application after the deadline, accompany your application with a letter explaining the reasons why you did not file during the filing period (or the grace period, if applicable). If the reason is deemed by the SBA to be beyond your control, your application may be accepted for processing.

### What are the consequences of taking out an SBA loan?

Like any other type of personal or business loan, defaulting on an SBA loan has similar consequences, including negative repercussions on your credit score. You should carefully read all loan disclosure statements and documents provided by the SBA before signing your loan.

### Where can I get more information about SBA loans?

The SBA releases disaster-specific fact sheets that contain information, such as applicable loan interest rates, deadlines, and other program information specific to that disaster and region. Press releases are also issued and posted by the SBA to provide information on available disaster assistance in the disaster-affected areas. These fact sheets and press releases are available at the SBA website under "Current Disaster Declaration Information" at <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/Declarations/Index>.

## HOME AND PERSONAL PROPERTY LOANS

### Is there a deadline for filing for an HPPL?

The deadline to file an HPPL application is currently **December 11, 2017**.

### Am I eligible to apply for a Home and Personal Property Loan?

You may be eligible for an SBA loan if you are a homeowner, renter, or owner of personal property and have incurred damage to your primary residence or tangible personal property during a disaster; you have satisfactory credit and character; and the SBA determines that you will be able to repay the loan. Generally, loans over \$25,000 must be secured by some collateral. The SBA will not decline a loan if you lack a particular amount of collateral as long as it is reasonably certain that you can repay your loan. If you refuse to pledge available collateral when requested by the SBA, however, the SBA may decline or cancel your loan. A first or second mortgage on damaged real estate is commonly used as collateral for an SBA disaster loan.

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

### **What are the amounts of HPPLs?**

Loans to repair or replace personal property, such as clothing, furniture, cars, and appliances, are available in an amount up to \$40,000, while real property loans to repair your primary residence are available in an amount up to \$200,000. The amount of each specific loan depends on individual facts and circumstances, including the applicant's ability to repay the loan and the applicant's past history with the SBA. (For example, if an applicant did not comply with the terms of a prior SBA loan, he or she likely will not be eligible for another SBA loan.)

### **What interest rate will I pay on my HDL? What are the repayment terms?**

For the 2017 California Wildfires Disaster (Disaster # CA-00279), if you can obtain credit elsewhere, your interest rate will be 3.500%. If you cannot obtain credit elsewhere, your interest rate will be 1.750%. "Credit elsewhere" means, based on the SBA's assessment, that you can obtain financing from non-federal sources on reasonable terms. Interest rates are fixed for the term of the loan.

The term of the loan will be determined by the SBA based on your needs and your ability to repay the loan. The maximum term is 30 years. The SBA will determine your installment payment amounts based on your ability to repay. Generally, you will pay equal monthly installments of principal and interest, beginning five months from the date of the loan. The SBA will consider other payment terms if you have seasonal or fluctuating income, and may allow installment payments of varying amounts over the first two years of the loan. There is no penalty for prepayment of home disaster loans.

### **Are there any limitations on the use of an HPPL?**

Yes. An HPPL is intended to help you return your property to the same condition it was in before the disaster. The loans may not be used to upgrade homes or make additions unless required by local building authority/code. Your loan authorization from the SBA will specify the permitted uses of the loan proceeds, and you will be required to maintain records of all HPPL expenditures for three years.

Your HPPL may be increased by up to 20% of the total amount of physical loss, as verified by the SBA, to make improvements that lessen the risk of property damage by future disasters of the same type.

*Exclusions:* The following types of property are ineligible for an HPPL: second homes, personal pleasure boats, airplanes, recreational vehicles, and similar property (unless used for business purposes, in which case you may be eligible for a BPD or EIDL as described further below). Property such as antiques and collections are eligible only to the extent of their functional value. Amounts for landscaping, swimming pools, etc. are limited.

### **I already have a mortgage on my home. I cannot afford a disaster loan, plus my current mortgage payment. Can the SBA refinance my mortgage?**

In certain cases, yes. The SBA can refinance all or part of prior mortgages, as evidenced by a recorded lien, provided you:

- do not have credit available elsewhere;
- have suffered substantial disaster damage not covered by insurance (40% or more of the value of the property); and
- intend to repair the damage.

An SBA disaster loan officer can provide more detailed information on your specific situation.

### **If my home is completely destroyed, can the SBA lend me money to relocate my home somewhere else?**

You may use your SBA disaster loan to relocate. The amount of the relocation loan depends on whether you relocate voluntarily or involuntarily. If you are interested in relocation, an SBA representative can provide you with more details on your specific situation.

### **I am a farmer and my barns, fence, and some crops were damaged as well as my home. Can I apply to the SBA for assistance?**

You may apply for an HPPL to cover the damage to your home and its contents only. The SBA cannot cover agriculture losses. Contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture for recovery assistance for your farm at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

### What information should I include with my HPPL application?

The necessary information is specified in the Disaster Home Loan Application (SBA Form 5c) and includes your contact information, Social Security number, FEMA registration number, deed or lease information, insurance information, and financial information (e.g., income, account balances, and monthly expenses), among other information. In addition to the loan application, you must also complete and sign the Tax Information Authorization Form (IRS Form 4506-T) to give permission for the IRS to give your federal tax information directly to the SBA, including information from your last three federal income tax returns. See the **How do I apply for an SBA loan?** section of this chapter.

## BUSINESS PHYSICAL DISASTER LOANS

### What is the deadline for applying for a BPDL?

The deadline to file an application for a BPDL is currently **December 11, 2017**.

### Is my business or non-profit organization eligible for a BPDL?

Almost all businesses and charitable or other non-profit entities that are located in a declared disaster area and have incurred damage to real or tangible personal property (e.g., real estate, equipment, inventory, machinery, fixtures, and leasehold improvements) as a result of the disaster may apply for an SBA loan to help repair or replace the damaged property. Your business may be a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, limited liability company, or other legal entity recognized under California law. The size of your business (average annual receipts or number of employees) will not be taken into consideration in determining your eligibility for a BPDL. Private, non-critical, non-profit organizations, such as charities, churches, private universities, food banks, homeless shelters, museums, libraries, community centers etc., are also eligible for BPDLS. Private non-profit organizations that provide critical services are referred to FEMA. "Critical services" include power, water, sewer services, wastewater treatment, communications, education, emergency medical care, fire department services, emergency rescue, and nursing homes.

BPDLS in excess of \$25,000 require that you pledge collateral to the extent it is available, including real estate collateral. In addition, personal guarantees by the principals of a business are required for all BPDLS. The SBA will generally not decline a loan for lack of collateral, but you must pledge collateral that is available.

### What are the amounts of BPDLS?

BPDLS are generally capped at \$2.0 million, and loan amounts cannot exceed the verified uninsured or otherwise uncompensated disaster loss. Further, while you may receive both a BPDL and an EIDL, the combined assistance is capped at \$2.0 million for the business and its affiliates for each disaster. The SBA can waive this cap in certain circumstances, such as if the business is a major source of employment.

### What interest rate will I pay on my BPDL? What are the repayment terms?

For the 2017 California Wildfires Disaster (Disaster # CA-00279), if your business, together with its affiliates and principal owners, has credit elsewhere, your interest rate will be 6.610%. If your business is a non-profit organization, your interest rate will be 5.25%. If your business does not have credit elsewhere, your interest rate will not exceed 3.305%. If your business is a non-profit organization and does not have credit elsewhere, your interest rate will be 2.500%. "Credit elsewhere" means, based on the SBA's assessment, that you can obtain financing from non-federal sources on reasonable terms.

The interest rates are fixed, and the term of the loan will be determined by the SBA based on your needs and your ability to repay the loan, but it cannot exceed seven years if you can receive credit elsewhere. Otherwise, the repayment term may be up to 30 years.

Generally, you must pay equal monthly installments, of principal and interest, beginning five months from the date of the loan as shown on the loan note. The SBA will consider other payment terms if you have seasonal or fluctuating income, and the SBA may allow installment payments of varying amounts over the first two years of the loan. There is no penalty for prepayment of disaster loans.

### Are there any limitations on the use of a BPDL?

Yes. Physical disaster loans are intended to be used to repair or replace real and personal property damaged to pre-disaster conditions and, under certain conditions, protect structures from future disasters. Proceeds from the loan can be used to cover items such as real property, machinery, equipment, fixtures, inventory, and leasehold improvements.

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

BPDLS to repair or replace real property or leasehold improvements may be increased by as much as 20% to protect the damaged property against possible future disasters of the same type.

A BPDL will be made for specific and designated purposes, and you will be required to keep records of all BPDL expenditures for three years.

*Exclusions:* Second homes, personal pleasure boats, airplanes, recreational vehicles, and similar property are not eligible for a BPDL unless you can demonstrate that they were used for business purposes. SBA funds cannot be used to expand or upgrade a business unless city or county building authorities/codes require such upgrades.

### **I already have a mortgage on my business, and I can't afford a disaster loan plus my current mortgage payment. Can the SBA refinance my mortgage?**

In certain cases, yes. The SBA can refinance all or part of prior mortgages, evidenced by a recorded lien, if you: (1) do not have credit available elsewhere; (2) have suffered substantial uncompensated disaster damage (40% or more of the value of the property); and (3) intend to repair the damage. Business owners may also be eligible for refinancing of mortgages or liens on real estate, machinery, and equipment, up to the amount of the loan for the repair or replacement of such real estate, machinery, and equipment.

### **If my business is completely destroyed, will the SBA lend me money for relocation?**

Yes. In certain circumstances, limited relocation costs can be included in the loan amount and depend on whether you relocate voluntarily or involuntarily. Whenever relocation is involved, you should contact the SBA Disaster Office before making any commitments.

### **What information should I include with my BPDL application?**

The BPDL application form asks for the same information about your business and its principal owners and managers that is generally required for a bank loan. The required information is specified in the loan application and includes:

(i) Business Loan Application (SBA Form 5); (ii) IRS Form 4506-T signed by the business, each principal owning 20% or more of the applicant business, each general partner or managing member, and, for any owner who has more than a 50% ownership in an affiliate business (affiliates include parents, subsidiaries and/or businesses with common ownership or management); (iii) a complete copy of the business's recent federal income tax returns (including all schedules); and (iv) schedule of liabilities listing all fixed debts (SBA Form 2202 may be used). The SBA may also request (a) a complete copy of the most recent federal income tax returns (including all schedules) of each principal owning 20% or more of the business, each general partner or managing partners and each affiliate when the owner has more than 50% ownership; (b) if the most recent federal income tax return has not been filed, a year-end profit and loss statement and balance sheet for the tax year; (c) a current year-to-date profit and loss statement; and (d) additional filing requirements (SBA Form 1368) providing monthly sales figures.

### **Am I required to submit a personal financial statement with my BPDL application?**

Yes. The SBA must review your financial statements and the financial statements for each partner, officer, director, and stockholder with 20% or more ownership. The SBA requires the principals of the business to personally guarantee repayment of the loan and, in some instances, to secure the loan by pledging additional collateral.

## **ECONOMIC INJURY DISASTER LOANS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES**

### **What is the deadline for applying for an EIDL?**

The deadline to file an application for an EIDL is currently **July 12, 2018**.

### **Is my business eligible for an EIDL?**

Your business may be eligible for an EIDL if the following conditions are met:

1. Your business is a small business, small agricultural cooperative, small business engaged in aquaculture, or a private non-profit organization of any size (under most circumstances);
2. Your business has suffered "substantial economic injury" as a result of the wildfires, regardless of physical damage;
3. Your business is located in a declared disaster area (or in a jurisdiction located next to the disaster area); and

## SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE

4. The business and its principals do not have credit available elsewhere.

The SBA defines a “**small business**” either in terms of the average number of employees over the past 12 months or average annual receipts over the past three years. In addition, the SBA defines a small business as a concern that:

- (i) is organized for profit;
- (ii) has a place of business in the United States;
- (iii) operates primarily within the United States or makes a significant contribution to the U.S. economy through payment of taxes or use of American products, materials, or labor;
- (iv) is independently owned and operated; and
- (v) is not dominant in its field on a national basis.

The business may be a sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, or any other legal form. In determining what constitutes a small business, the definition will vary to reflect industry differences, such as size standards. For industry size guidelines, see <https://www.sba.gov/contracting/getting-started-contractor/make-sure-you-meet-sba-size-standards>.

In addition, certain categories of businesses are not eligible for an EIDL. These include some non-profits, religious organizations, businesses that derive one-third of their annual income from legal gambling, and agricultural enterprises (other than small nurseries and small agricultural cooperatives). Individuals also are not eligible for EIDLs.

The SBA defines “substantial economic injury” as the inability of a business to meet its obligations as they come due or to pay its ordinary and necessary operating expenses due to the wildfires. Loss of anticipated profits or a drop in sales is not sufficient to establish substantial economic injury. Indicators of economic injury might be a larger than normal volume of receivables, a lower sales volume, and the development of delinquencies in debt payments.

Your business must be located in the declared disaster areas or certain counties or other political subdivisions that are contiguous to the declared disaster area.

EIDL working capital loans are meant to help eligible businesses meet their ordinary and necessary financial obligations that cannot be met as a direct result of the disaster and are intended to assist through the disaster recovery period. If the amount of the EIDL loan is over \$25,000, you will be required to pledge collateral to the extent that it is available, including real estate collateral. The SBA will generally not decline a loan for lack of collateral, but you may be required to pledge available collateral and provide personal guarantees by principals of the business for repayment of the loan.

### **If I can borrow from a bank, am I still eligible for an EIDL?**

Private credit sources must be used as much as possible to overcome the economic injury. The SBA can provide EIDL assistance only to the extent the business (and its principals) cannot recover by using its own resources and normal lending channels.

### **What are the amounts of EIDLs?**

EIDLs are generally capped at \$2.0 million, and loan amounts cannot exceed the verified uninsured or otherwise uncompensated disaster loss. Further, while you may receive both a BPDFL and an EIDL, the combined assistance is capped at \$2.0 million for the business and its affiliates for each disaster. The SBA can waive this cap in certain circumstances, such as if the business is a major source of employment.

You may request an EIDL for the amount of economic injury and operating needs, but not in excess of what your business could have paid had the disaster not occurred. In determining the eligible amount, the SBA will look at: (1) the total of your debt obligations; (2) operating expenses that mature during the period affected by the disaster, plus the amount you need to maintain a reasonable working capital position during that period; and (3) expenses you could have met and a working capital position you could have maintained had the disaster not occurred.

The amount of your economic injury does not automatically represent the dollar amount of your loan eligibility; the actual amount of each loan is limited to the economic injury determined by the SBA less business interruption insurance and other recoveries up to the administrative lending limit.

## **SBA LOAN ASSISTANCE**

### **What interest rate will apply to my EIDL? What are the repayment terms?**

The interest rates are fixed for the term of the loan. For the 2017 California Wildfires Disaster (Disaster # CA-00279), the annual interest rate for EIDLs for businesses is 3.305%. If your business is an eligible non-profit organization, the annual interest for EIDLs is 2.500%. The maximum term of an EIDL is 30 years. The actual term will be determined by the SBA based on your business needs and your ability to repay the loan.

### **Are there any limitations on the use of an EIDL?**

Yes. An EIDL is intended to help you maintain a secure financial condition until your business is back to normal. It provides operating funds until your business recovers. For instance, you may use an EIDL to make payments on short-term notes, accounts payable, and installment payments on long-term notes to the extent that you could have made these payments had the disaster not occurred. Your loan will be made for specific and designated purposes, and you will be required to keep records of all BPDFL expenditures for three years.

You may not use EIDL funds to: (1) pay cash dividends or other disbursements to owners, partners, officers, or shareholders not directly related to the performance of services for the business; (2) refinance long-term debts or provide working capital that was needed by the business prior to the disaster; (3) make payments on loans owed to another federal agency or Small Business Investment Company (as defined by the Small Business Investment Act); (4) pay any obligations resulting from a federal, state, or local tax penalty (resulting from negligence or fraud) or any non-tax criminal fine, civil fine, or penalty for non-compliance with a law or regulation; or (5) repair physical damage.

### **What documents should I use to show my losses when applying for an EIDL?**

In order for the SBA to compare your financial condition and operating results prior to the wildfires with those during and after the wildfires, you must furnish balance sheets and operating statements for both pre-disaster and post-disaster periods of time. The specific requirements are contained in the EIDL application form and include: (i) Business Loan Application (SBA Form 5); (ii) IRS Form 4506-T signed by the business, each principal owning 20% or more of the applicant business, each general partner or managing member, and each affiliate when any owner has more than a 50% ownership in the affiliate business (affiliates include parents, subsidiaries, and/or businesses with common ownership or management); (iii) a complete copy of the business's recent Federal income tax returns (including all schedules); and (iv) schedule of liabilities listing all fixed debts (SB Form 2202 may be used). The SBA may also request (a) a complete copy of the most recent federal income tax returns (including all schedules) of each principal owning 20% or more of the business, each general partner or managing partners and each affiliate when the owner has more than 50% ownership; (b) if the most recent federal income tax return has not been filed, a year-end profit and loss statement and balance sheet for the tax year; (c) a current year-to-date profit and loss statement; and (d) additional filing requirements (SBA Form 1368) providing monthly sales figures.

### **Am I required to submit a personal financial statement with my loan application?**

Yes. The SBA must review your financial statement and the financial statements of each partner, officer, director, and stockholder with 20% or more ownership in your business. The SBA requires the principals of the business to personally guarantee repayment of the loan and, in some instances, to secure the loan by pledging additional collateral.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

### CONTRACTS

#### Performance Excused

##### **If my business was physically destroyed or damaged by the wildfires, do my contracts for goods and services need to be performed?**

It depends. A party will generally be relieved from its obligation to supply goods or perform services if, without the party's fault, performance of the contract has become impossible. However, the impossibility must be "objective," in the sense that no one can perform the contract. (For example, a contract to clean houses that burned to the ground would be impossible to perform.) If reasonable alternative means for performance of the contract are available, impossibility is not likely to apply. However, other legal doctrines that are described below may apply.

##### **My business is in the affected area and has not been physically affected by the wildfires; however, my business has substantially deteriorated after the wildfires. Do my contracts for goods and services need to be performed?**

They must be performed in most cases. Typically, impossibility excuses a party's performance only when the destruction of the subject matter of the contract or the means of performance renders performance impossible. In addition, a party may be excused from performing its contractual obligations if performance is found to be impracticable. However, if a party has a choice of ways to perform the obligations and only one option is precluded, then this is not generally considered impracticable, even if the remaining option is more burdensome or more expensive.

##### **If my business has been taken over by police, fire, or another state agency for relief work, are contracts for future performance excused?**

Generally, yes. When the government, through its sovereign power, intervenes for the public's needs or makes performance of a contract impossible, the contracting parties are generally relieved of further liability. Because the test is whether a change renders performance impossible, the mere fact that a contract has become more difficult or expensive to perform because of a new law or regulation does not excuse performance. In addition, government intervention may only provide for a delay in performance rather than a permanent excuse.

##### **Does a "force majeure" clause in a contract that my business has with another party automatically relieve the other party of its liability under the contract?**

Not automatically, as this depends on the terms of the force majeure clause and how broadly it is drafted. A "force majeure" clause is a provision in a contract that excuses a party to the contract from performing under the contract because of the occurrence of an event beyond the party's control. Force majeure clauses vary in scope: a force majeure clause may be drafted broadly (to include commonly known "acts of God" such as natural disasters or acts of war and then also a catch-all phrase such as "or other events beyond its control" or "unavoidable causes") or more narrowly (listing only specific events, without a catch-all). A party may excuse itself from liability under a force majeure clause only by showing that the event preventing its performance is covered by that clause.

Even if the contract does not contain a force majeure clause, or if the clause is not broad enough to include the events surrounding the wildfires, it is possible that a contract will not be enforced due to impossibility and impracticability, as discussed above.

##### **If the business owner or key employee is deceased (or incapacitated), does the business still need to perform contracts of personal service?**

This may depend on the circumstances or individuals involved. If the act or acts to be performed under the contract are ones that can be performed only by the particular individual named in the contract (e.g., delivery of a painting by a particular artist), then the contract will not be enforced due to impossibility. Therefore, if the primary purpose of a personal services contract is to provide that a specified person must perform in a certain manner, then there is an implied intent by the parties to hold each other liable only if the health and life of that specified person permits performance under the contract.

##### **What happens to advances received from third parties (or given to third parties) where the performance of the contract is excused?**

Generally, if goods or services are not supplied, advances must be returned to the third party.



## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

**In a situation where I can no longer deliver or accept goods under my contracts, can someone else perform on my behalf?**

Absent a provision in the contract prohibiting assignment, a party may be able to delegate or assign its duties or rights under a contract to someone else unless the other party has a substantial interest in having the original promisor perform the acts required by the contract. The rights of the buyer or seller may also be assigned unless the assignment would significantly change the duty of the other party, increase the burden or risk imposed on him or her by the contract, or significantly impair the chance of obtaining return performance. Parties delegating or assigning duties will still be liable under the original contract if there is a failure of performance by the assignee. Please note that many commercial contracts provide that duties of the buyer and seller cannot be delegated or assigned without the prior written consent of the other party.

### **Liability for Damaged Property**

**What if goods that were paid for by the buyer were destroyed before they could be delivered?**

It depends on whether the risk of the goods' loss had already passed to the buyer at the time of the destruction. If the seller and the buyer have explicitly agreed in their specific contract on when the risk of loss shifts to the buyer, the terms of such contract controls. In the absence of such a specific contract, risk of loss of sold goods generally passes from the seller to the buyer in the following manner: (1) if a contract requires physical delivery of identified goods to a specific destination, risk of loss passes on tender of the goods at that destination; (2) if the contract does not specify a place of delivery, but the goods need to be shipped to the buyer, risk of loss passes at the time and place the goods are delivered to the carrier or if delivery is to be made without moving the goods, risk of loss passes at the time and place documents of title are delivered; and (3) in all other cases, risk of loss passes, if the seller is a merchant, only when the buyer actually receives the goods or, if the seller is not a merchant, on tender of delivery. Special rules apply when the seller was already in breach of the specific contract at the time of destruction. (Please note in conjunction with these issues that an insurance policy may cover damage to or destruction of the goods.)

**If I have equipment that was either leased or purchased on credit and is now destroyed or damaged, am I obligated to continue making payments on the equipment?**

This question is usually governed by the terms of the specific contract, lease, or credit agreement. In addition, the loss of equipment could be covered by an insurance policy. If the equipment was not covered by an insurance policy, it is most likely that payments must continue to be made. You should contact your lender or lessor to discuss what options are available to you.

**Is my business liable for damage to a customer's property caused by the wildfires? For instance, is my dry cleaning or laundry business liable for damage to customers' clothing that was in the store? Or is my jewelry/TV/watch repair store liable for damages to customers' property that was in the store for purposes of repair or maintenance?**

Maybe not. When the owner of personal property (a "bailor") delivers the property to another (a "bailee") for a particular purpose, with the understanding that the property must be returned to the bailor, a bailment contract is formed. In each of the three situations above, a bailment relationship exists for the benefit of both parties because the bailee receives compensation and the bailor receives a service. Therefore, the bailee would only be liable to the bailor for property damaged through the bailee's negligence.

Because the relevant legal standard is the bailee's negligence, it is necessary to consider how the property was damaged or lost and what actions the bailee took to protect it. Destruction caused by the wildfires would not likely be a breach of the bailment contract. Courts of law determine whether someone acted negligently largely by asking if such person acted reasonably in the circumstances.

(Please note in conjunction with these issues that an insurance policy may cover damage to or destruction of the goods.)

### **Lost Checks or Correspondence**

**Has a contract been formed if, in response to my offer, the offeree sent an acceptance by mail but I never received it because it was lost or destroyed?**

Probably. Assuming that you, as the offeror, did not specify a mode of acceptance other than mail, acceptance of an offer becomes effective at the moment the letter is dropped in the mailbox, and not upon receipt. This is known among lawyers as the "mailbox rule" or "postal acceptance rule." The offeree has the power to accept and close the contract by mailing a

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

letter of acceptance within a time specified in the offer (or within a reasonable time, if no time is stated). However, many offers and contracts contain specific language which does specify terms concerning when acceptance is effected and these more specific terms will generally override the mailbox rule.

**If my insurance payment premium was due on October 3 and the payment was sent on September 30, would the policy cover damages that occurred on October 2, even if the payment was not received on the actual due date or was destroyed in the mail?**

The “mailbox rule” or “postal acceptance rule” described above should also apply to insurance premiums absent more specific language in the offer or premium renewal notice concerning the mode of acceptance. Assuming that the policy is silent and the insurance company requested that the premium be mailed and it can be established that the premium payment was mailed in a timely manner, the insurance company is obligated to provide the agreed upon insurance coverage to the insured party because the payment was mailed prior to the due date.

### Business Licenses

**My business was destroyed by the wildfires. Is my business license still in effect, and what must I do if it needs to be replaced?**

For any issues relating to business licenses, we suggest you contact the state or local authority that issued your license.

## REAL ESTATE

The following questions are designed to provide general information for small businesses that rent their space from a landlord, and for landlords who rent space to small businesses. (For questions about landlord-tenant issues for a residence, please refer to the **Housing** chapter of this handbook.) As with other information in this handbook, this section is intended to provide general information that may be helpful in assessing the types of legal questions that may be faced by small businesses and landlords that rent space to small businesses. In dealing with specific situations, it is advisable to consult with the business’s attorney or a legal aid organization.

Generally, the rights of both the commercial tenant and the landlord will be determined by the provisions of the applicable lease. The provisions of a lease which cover these matters can vary significantly, even for different leases in the same building. The following is only general advice for commercial tenants and landlords regarding property that is damaged or unusable as a result of accidental destruction relating to the wildfires and is based on general principles of state law in California and some of the form leases commonly used in California. A professional will need to check the provisions of your lease carefully to answer these questions for your particular case.

### Commercial Leases

**What happens if the building or property that is leased is destroyed? Does the lease automatically terminate? Does the tenant have to pay rent?**

To answer these questions, you will need to first check your lease to see if there are any specific written provisions setting forth what happens if the leased premises are destroyed or damaged. Most commercial leases include these types of provisions, and these provisions may include definitions that will help you determine whether your leased premises have been destroyed or damaged and what the rights and obligations of the landlord and tenant are in those situations. If your lease contains such written provisions, those written provisions will govern and should provide the answers to your questions.

If your lease does not contain specific provisions setting forth what happens when the leased premises are destroyed or damaged, or if you do not have a written lease, then these questions will be answered based on general principles of California law. Under California law, unless a lease contains specific provisions to the contrary, a lease automatically terminates when the leased premises are entirely destroyed. Whether the leased premises have been entirely destroyed is a factual determination made on a case-by-case basis.

If the leased premises are not entirely destroyed, but are “substantially damaged,” then, absent a lease provision to the contrary, the tenant will have the option to terminate the lease with a notice to the landlord. The leased premises are “substantially damaged” when the leased premises have been directly or indirectly damaged to the extent that they are no longer fit for the use for which they were originally leased. This is a factual determination made on a case-by-case basis.

## **BUSINESS INTERRUPTION**

Whether the leased premises are no longer fit for the use for which they were originally leased will depend on several factors. The primary factor is the extent of damage. For example, if a substantial portion of the leased premises burns to the ground, the leased premises would likely be considered substantially damaged. But if the damage to the leased premises is limited (for example, if only the roof is damaged or smoke or water from firefighting only damaged the ceiling, floor, or carpet of the leased premises), then the leased premises would likely not be considered substantially damaged and the tenant would likely not be able to terminate the lease on the basis of that damage.

Another factor in determining whether the leased premises were substantially damaged is the landlord's ability to repair the leased premises. If the landlord can repair the damage to the leased premises in a reasonable period of time, then the leased premises are less likely to be considered substantially damaged and the tenant may not be able to terminate the lease on the basis of that damage. A further factor in determining whether the leased premises were substantially damaged is understanding the use for which they were originally leased. For example, if the leased premises are a retail store, damage that results in the leased premises being inaccessible to the public may render the leased premises substantially damaged even if the extent of damage is not that great.

If the lease is terminated, the tenant is relieved of its obligation to pay rent after such termination. However, unless the lease provides otherwise, the tenant is not entitled to a refund of any prepaid rent. If the lease is not terminated, the tenant must continue to pay rent according to the terms of the lease. In some cases, depending upon the terms of the lease, the tenant may be able to pay an adjusted rent until necessary repairs are made, but the need for repairs does not automatically release the tenant from its obligation to pay rent.

### **What degree of damage to the leased premises constitutes "partially damaged" or "entirely destroyed" or "substantially damaged"?**

The answer depends on the individual facts involved. To be considered "entirely destroyed" or "substantially damaged," the leased premises must generally cease to be fit for the use for which they were originally leased. While major fire damage will likely result in the leased premises being entirely destroyed or substantially damaged, more limited fire damage and damage from smoke and/or water may only result in the leased premises being considered "partially damaged." When determining the extent of damage to the leased premises, it is important to carefully consider what constitutes the "leased premises." For example, in the case of a ground lease in which the tenant leases the underlying land and is responsible for all improvements upon the land, the leased premises are the land itself not the improvements constructed on the land. Therefore, the destruction of or damage to the improvements will generally not be considered destruction of or damage to the leased premises, and the tenant will not have a right to terminate the lease as the result of such destruction or damage. In other cases, the leased premises may be a suite within a building or a storefront within a shopping center and the extent of damage will be determined based on the direct and indirect damage to that specific suite or storefront and not the entire building or shopping center.

### **Is the landlord obligated to rebuild the building?**

Again, it is important to refer to your lease, as commercial leases generally include provisions dealing with the landlord's obligations to rebuild. Absent an express provision in the lease, while the lease may be terminated or subject to termination, the landlord is not obligated to rebuild the building or leased premises.

### **If the landlord terminates the lease, is the tenant entitled to receive its security deposit?**

Yes, unless the express terms of the lease make it non-refundable. According to California law, the landlord must refund the security deposit (less any lawful deductions) within 30 days after the tenant vacates the leased premises.

### **Is the landlord required to repair and restore the tenant's furniture and equipment?**

Generally, the landlord is not required to repair any damage to the tenant's furniture and/or furnishings or any fixtures or equipment, improvements, or appurtenances that are removable. This damage may be covered by the tenant's insurance company.

### **Is the tenant obligated to pay rent during the time that the landlord makes repairs on the building?**

If the lease is terminated as the result of the leased premises being entirely destroyed or substantially damaged, then the tenant is relieved of its obligation to pay rent after such termination. Under California law, rent reductions for partial damage will be governed by the terms of the lease or a negotiated resolution with the landlord.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

Once the landlord completes the restoration of the leased premises, the tenant may still have work to do to repair installations, phones, office equipment, etc. The tenant will be obligated to pay rent during this time period, but may be able to cover the cost of that rent from proceeds of the tenant's business interruption insurance policy.

### **How long can the landlord take to repair the leased premises?**

If the landlord elects or is required to repair the leased premises under the terms of the lease, the landlord must do so in a reasonably expeditious manner, subject to delays due to adjustment of insurance claims, labor troubles, and causes beyond the landlord's control.

### **Can the tenant withhold rent if the landlord has failed to timely repair the leased premises after the disaster?**

Generally, unless the lease provides otherwise, a tenant remains obligated to pay rent if the leased premises are usable and are not entirely destroyed or substantially damaged, as discussed above. Thus, the requirement to pay rent is not generally dependent on whether the landlord makes timely repairs, unless the lease permits the tenant to terminate the lease on this basis and the tenant acts to do so. Remember, however, that commercial leases usually have specific provisions regarding repairs and that the lease provisions will dictate the rights of the landlord and tenant. Refer to your lease for more information.

### **If the landlord elects to terminate the lease, is the landlord obligated to help the tenant find alternative space or reimburse the tenant for related costs?**

No, unless the lease contains a specific provision that provides for this obligation.

### **Can the landlord rent the leased premises to someone else while the tenant is gone?**

No, unless the lease expressly provides otherwise, a landlord cannot rent the leased premises to another party unless the lease has been terminated or the tenant has agreed to a sublet or assignment. The landlord has an obligation to make the leased premises available to the tenant as long as the lease is in effect. The landlord cannot impair the tenant's "quiet possession" (i.e., the legal right to use property without other parties' interference) of the leased premises unless there has been a default by the tenant and the lease has been terminated.

## **Condemned Buildings**

### **Can the building be condemned?**

Yes. Governmental agencies that have jurisdiction over a building may order it to be condemned if the building is not suitable for safe occupancy or for other public purpose reasons. Generally, either FEMA or the local building inspection department are the agencies that have jurisdiction to determine that a building cannot safely be occupied.

### **If the building is condemned, will the property owner be paid for the loss?**

When the government condemns property based on a finding that it is no longer habitable or safe for occupancy, the government is not responsible for paying for the loss of the property. Generally, the government is only required to pay for the loss of the property when the property is taken by the government for public use. Condemnation of property as unsafe is generally not a "taking" for public use. To the extent the owner cannot recover the lost value of the condemned property, the property owner might be able to recover all or part of the value of the property from the owner's insurance (depending on the terms of that insurance) or from FEMA or other relief agencies.

## **TAX RELIEF**

### **I own a building in the area which was damaged. Is there any relief from my obligation to pay property taxes?**

Taxpayers with taxable business property that was damaged or destroyed by the wildfires may be eligible for property tax relief. Applications for reduced assessments must be filed with the County Assessor. Taxpayers should contact their local County Assessor for more information. Contact information for County Assessors and additional tax-related information is provided in the **Housing** chapter of this handbook.

### **Can I get an extension to file returns and pay my business taxes?**

For California taxpayers impacted by the wildfires, the California Franchise Tax Board (FTB) has granted an extension to file 2016 California personal and corporate income tax returns and make payments until January 31, 2018. Thus, taxpayers in the Counties of Orange, Solano, Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Sonoma, and Yuba have until January 31, 2018 to file their 2016 California personal and corporate income tax returns.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

In addition, the State Board of Equalization (BOE) has granted an extension of up to three months to file and pay taxes or fees for the following BOE-administered programs: alcoholic beverage tax; California tire fee; childhood lead poisoning prevention fee; cigarette and tobacco products tax; covered electronic waste recycling fee; diesel fuel tax; emergency telephone users surcharge; energy resources surcharge; fire prevention fee; hazardous waste activity fee; hazardous waste disposal fee; hazardous waste environmental fee; hazardous waste facility fee; hazardous waste generator fee; hazardous waste management fee; interstate user diesel fuel tax; jet fuel tax; lumber products assessment fee; marine invasive species fee; motor vehicle fuel tax; natural gas surcharge; occupational lead poisoning prevention fee; oil spill response, prevention, and administration fee; prepaid mobile telephony services (MTS) surcharge; regional railroad accident preparedness and immediate response fee; sales and use tax; timber yield tax; underground storage tank maintenance fee; use fuel tax; and water rights fee. This relief is offered to any business owner or feepayer who was directly affected by the wildfires in the counties listed above and who, as a result, cannot meet their filing and payment deadlines. The BOE has also extended the deadline for filings that were delayed by disruption of service of the United States Postal Service or private mail and freight companies. To request relief from the BOE, please visit <http://www.boe.ca.gov/pdf/fdisas.pdf>.

### **Can I get relief from interest and penalties if I am late filing and paying various business taxes?**

Taxpayers who are unable to file their returns and pay taxes and fees in a timely manner may receive relief from interest and penalties. In the case of personal and corporate income taxes, the FTB will cancel interest and any late filing or late payment penalties that would otherwise apply for the length of any postponement periods. Additionally, the BOE offers relief from interest and penalties for the late filing and payment of the types of tax or fee administered by the BOE listed above. In order to qualify for relief from interest and penalties, the taxpayer must include a statement signed under the penalty of perjury stating the cause for the late filing. To request relief from interest and penalties from the BOE, please visit <http://www.boe.ca.gov/pdf/fdisas.pdf>.

### **Can I get copies of Franchise Tax Board tax returns and State Board of Equalization tax records lost in the fire?**

Taxpayers may receive copies of California tax returns filed with the FTB at no charge to replace lost or damaged tax returns. To obtain a copy, taxpayers should complete Form FTB 3516, Request for Copy of Tax Return (<https://www.ftb.ca.gov/forms/misc/3516.pdf>) and print the name of the specific fire, your county, and 2017 (e.g., "Tubbs Fire, Napa County, 2017") in red ink at the top of the form. You can download the form at the link above or order one by calling (800) 852-5711.

Business owners and feepayers may also obtain replacements of BOE tax records lost in the wildfires, free of charge. To obtain copies of such records, including prior tax returns filed with the BOE, audits, and permit application forms, taxpayers should call (800) 400-7115.

## EMPLOYMENT

The answers to each of the following questions are based on the assumption that the affected employees are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement and do not have an employment contract with their employer. In the event that the affected employees are covered by a collective bargaining agreement or an employment contract, the employer should consult the terms and conditions of those agreements and contracts. Similarly, if the employer has certain established employment policies, the employer should consult and comply with its policies. The answers below address situations in general and it is advisable to obtain advice from a qualified lawyer or legal aid organization when dealing with a specific situation, especially one that involves difficult employer-employee issues.

### **Salary and Leave**

#### **Does an employer have to pay its employees for the days that its business was closed as a result of the fires?**

The answer to this question depends on whether the employee is considered an "exempt" employee or a "non-exempt" employee for purposes of federal and state wage-and-hour laws. Every employee must be treated as either exempt (not entitled to premium pay for overtime hours worked) or non-exempt (entitled to premium pay for overtime hours worked) under these laws. The determination of whether an employee is exempt or non-exempt is a complicated, fact-specific determination. Generally speaking, an employee is considered a non-exempt employee if the employee is paid on an hourly basis and not on a salary basis. In contrast, to be considered an exempt employee, an employee must be paid on a salary basis and must have certain job duties and responsibilities that are executive, administrative, or professional (among others) as required under the applicable federal and state wage-and-hour laws.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

An employer is not required to pay its non-exempt employees for any days or hours that the employees did not work because the business was closed during the fires. On the other hand, an exempt employee should receive his or her full salary for any workweek in which he or she performed any work without regard to the number of days or hours worked. Thus, if an exempt employee worked on Sunday, October 15, 2017, but worked no other days during the week of October 15, 2017, then the employer should pay the exempt employee his or her full salary for the week of October 15, 2017.

In addition, to the extent employees perform work for the employer during the wildfires, employers should continue to pay such employees for such work on the paydays designated in advance by the employer (e.g., at least twice each calendar month), whether or not the employer's offices are closed due to the fires.

### **Once an employer reopens its business, does the employer have to pay its employees for the days on which a transportation problem or some other obstacle prevented them from reporting to work?**

This also depends on whether the employee is considered an exempt or non-exempt employee. For purposes of wage-and-hour laws, the employer is not required to pay a non-exempt employee for any days or hours that the employee was absent from work due to a transportation problem or some other obstacle that prevented him or her from reporting to work. An exempt employee should receive his or her full salary for any workweek in which he or she performed any work.

### **Can an employer require its employees to use their accrued vacation or sick leave to cover their absences from work due to the wildfires?**

Once the employer reopens its business, if an employee is unable to report to work due to the wildfires, the employer may require an employee to use his or her accrued vacation or may allow an employee to use sick leave to cover his or her absences, provided that this is consistent with the employer's leave policies.

If an employee's absence qualifies as a leave under the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or its California counterpart, the California Family Rights Act (CFRA), or pregnancy disability leave under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), employer-mandated substitution of vacation or sick leave may not be permitted. See below for discussion of the FMLA, CFRA, and pregnancy-related leave under the FEHA.

The FMLA and CFRA apply only to those employers that employ 50 or more employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year. An employee is entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave if the employee: (1) has been with the employer for at least 12 months; (2) logged at least 1,250 hours of services during the 12-month period immediately preceding the start of the leave; and (3) is employed at a worksite where 50 or more employees are employed by the employer or within 75 miles of that worksite. FMLA or CFRA leave may be taken to care for the employee's spouse, registered domestic partner (or partner's child or parent), child, or parent with a serious health condition or because of a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the functions of the employee's position.

### **Does an employer have to provide an employee with either paid or unpaid leave if the employee is unable to work as a result of an injury suffered during the wildfires?**

Employers may be required to provide employees with unpaid leave (1) under the FMLA or CFRA if the employee or a member of his or her immediate family is suffering from a serious health condition; (2) under the FEHA, for pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or (3) under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or FEHA if the employee is disabled and if the granting of leave would serve as a reasonable accommodation for the employee's disability.

**Leave Under the FMLA and CFRA.** The FMLA and CFRA provide that a covered employee may take up to a total of 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for certain qualifying reasons. During the leave period, the employer must maintain the employee's health benefits and must guarantee that the employee will be reinstated to the same or an equivalent position. FMLA and CFRA leave is unpaid, unless the employer has elected to pay employees during such leave or requires or permits you to use vacation, PTO, or sick leave.

The applicability of the FMLA and CFRA is as described above. For more information regarding compliance with the FMLA, check the following website: <https://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/APPENDIXF.htm>.

For more information regarding compliance with the CFRA, check the following website: <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/resources/frequently-asked-questions/employment-faqs/pregnancy-disability-leave-faqs/pdl-cfra-fmla-guide/>.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

***Pregnancy-Related Leave Under the FEHA.*** Under the FEHA, employers with five or more employees must allow female employees to take up to four months of leave for periods of disability due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. The employee may elect to use accrued vacation leave, and may be required to substitute sick leave, or any other accrued leave which is made available by the employer to temporarily disabled employees. Pregnancy-related leave under the FEHA is unpaid, unless your employer has elected to pay employees during such leave. The employer must continue to provide the same benefits or privileges of employment granted by that employer to other employees.

As described below, you may also be eligible to receive disability benefits under the California SDI program during a qualifying pregnancy-related leave.

For more information regarding the FEHA, check the following website: <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2017/06/CAamendedFEHAREgsEmployers20160401Final.pdf>.

***Leave Under the ADA and FEHA.*** Under certain circumstances, an employer may be required to provide an employee with leave under the ADA and FEHA. The ADA and FEHA require employers, in certain circumstances, to provide reasonable accommodations to employees who have a disability. Such a reasonable accommodation may include providing an employee with an unpaid or paid leave of absence.

The FEHA generally provides broader protections than its federal counterpart, the ADA. Though the ADA applies to only those employers that employ 15 or more employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar workweeks in the current or preceding calendar year, the FEHA applies to employers with five or more employees. In addition, under the ADA, an employee is “disabled” if the employee has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a “major life activity” of an individual, including activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, sitting, standing, lifting, or reaching, whereas under the FEHA, an employee is “disabled” if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that limits a “major life activity.” Generally, temporary impairments are not considered protected disabilities.

### **Is an employee entitled to either paid or unpaid leave so that he or she can care for children or family members injured by the wildfires?**

As described above, employees may be entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave, which they can use to care for children or family members injured in the wildfires. If employees are entitled to FMLA or CFRA leave as described above, then the employer must allow them to take FMLA or CFRA leave. This leave does not have to be paid leave, but employees are entitled to use their accrued vacation or sick leave for the absence as well as unpaid leave. In addition, employees may also be eligible to receive benefits under the California Paid Family Leave program during a qualifying FMLA or CFRA leave if the leave is taken to care for a seriously ill family member. In addition, employers should be sure to comply with any specific policies providing for leave under such circumstances.

For more information regarding the California Paid Family Leave program, check the following website: [http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid\\_Family\\_Leave.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid_Family_Leave.htm). To the extent employees request leave to care for a seriously ill family member, employers are required to provide such employees with the following pamphlet, which describes the California Paid Family Leave program: [http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf\\_pub\\_ctr/de2511.pdf](http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf_pub_ctr/de2511.pdf).

### **Is an employee entitled to either paid or unpaid leave if the employee is too afraid or emotionally traumatized to return to work as a result of the wildfires?**

If an employee is suffering from post-traumatic stress or some other mental condition, the employer may be required to provide the employee with unpaid leave under the FMLA or CFRA or as an accommodation under the ADA or FEHA. However, the employee will have to meet the applicable requirements of the FMLA or CFRA and ADA, as set forth above. If the employer provides paid leave, the employee may be able to use his or her accrued vacation or sick leave for the absence.

### **Where can an employer get more information about complying with the FMLA, CFRA, ADA, and FEHA?**

The United States Department of Labor’s website at <https://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/APPENDIXF.htm> contains detailed information about the FMLA, including a fact sheet, a compliance guide, the text of the statute and accompanying regulations, and relevant forms. For more information regarding compliance with the CFRA, check the following website: <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/resources/frequently-asked-questions/employment-faqs/pregnancy-disability-leave-faqs/pdl-cfra-fmla-guide/>.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

The Department of Justice has online information about the ADA at <https://www.ada.gov/>. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing provides online information regarding the FEHA at <https://www.dfeh.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2017/06/CAamendedFEHAreqsEmployers20160401Final.pdf>.

### **What can employers do to help their employees recover psychologically from the trauma of the wildfires and their aftermath?**

An employer's health plan may experience an increase in mental health claims, as well as more requests for assistance under employee assistance programs (EAPs). Employers should advise their employees of both the availability and the importance of such counseling, both for themselves and their families. If an employer does not offer an EAP, counseling and other related services are available on a fee-paying basis. If employees are veterans, assistance may be available from the Department of Veterans Affairs online at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> or by calling the Veterans Crisis Line (800) 273-8255 (press 1).

In addition, employers should consider telling their employees about the free National Disaster Distress Hotline, which is staffed by trained mental health counselors and available to help those coping with the emotional consequences of the wildfires. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at (800) 985-5990 or by texting "talkwithus" (or, for Spanish, "hablanos") to 66746.

### **What should be done about Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) coverage?**

Employers having 20 or more employees who maintain health plans are required to offer continuation coverage under the federal COBRA law to qualified beneficiaries (participating employees and/or their dependents) who lose health coverage due to a "qualifying event" (such as the death of the covered employee, termination of employment, or reduction of hours sufficient to cause the loss of medical coverage). Smaller employers (with 2 to 19 employees) that maintain health plans are required by California's Continuation Benefits Replacement Act (Cal-COBRA) to provide COBRA-like coverage to their eligible employees. Under both COBRA and Cal-COBRA, employees must pay for this medical coverage themselves.

Once an affected employee experiences a qualifying event, the employer must take action to notify its plan administrator within the prescribed time period. Qualified beneficiaries must be informed of their right to continued health insurance coverage under COBRA within 44 days (the employer must notify the plan administrator within 30 days, and the plan administrator must then notify eligible dependents within 14 days) of a qualifying event. All required notices regarding COBRA should be timely and carefully documented. Generally, the qualified beneficiary has 60 days from the later of (a) the date of termination of coverage or (b) his or her receipt of a COBRA notice, to elect to continue coverage. COBRA coverage can continue for up to 36 months under applicable California and federal law.

Employers, while not required to do so, have the option of extending certain non-mandated COBRA benefits in the wake of the wildfires (such as offering to pay for COBRA premiums for a certain length of time). Employers that have an established severance pay practice or plan that provides for payment for COBRA premiums should follow the terms of that plan or practice.

### **Damage to Office and Records**

#### **If an employer's records were destroyed as a result of the wildfires and their aftermath, what basic payroll records does the employer need to try to recreate?**

Under applicable federal law, every employer must establish, maintain, and preserve employee records, including the following information for each employee:

- employee's full name, as used for Social Security purposes and, on the same record, the employee's identifying symbol or number if it is used in place of a name on any time, work, or payroll records;
- address, including zip code;
- birth date, if younger than 19;
- sex and occupation;
- time and day of week when employee's workweek begins;
- hours worked each day and total hours worked each workweek;
- basis on which employee's wages are paid (e.g., "\$15 per hour," "\$600 a week," "piecework");
- regular hourly pay rate;
- total daily or weekly straight-time earnings;
- total overtime earnings for the workweek;
- all additions to or deductions from the employee's wages;



## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

- total wages paid each pay period, including money paid in cash; and
- date of payment and the pay period covered by the payment.

Under applicable California law, payroll and personnel records must be maintained by the employer, and the employer must make certain records available to the employee upon request. An employer's failure to have such records in its possession may subject the employer to liability in the form of penalties under the California Labor Code, and possible civil liability. However, if such records have been destroyed due to the wildfires, these and other circumstances suggesting impossibility of performance may be considered as an affirmative defense according to the California Labor Code. In any event, the employer should attempt to recreate as many of the above records as possible within a reasonable period of time.

### **When must an employer pay its workers if the employer's payroll records were destroyed?**

California requires timely payment of wages according to a regularly set schedule established by the employer, in compliance with the requirements of the California Labor Code. In most cases, employees must be paid at least twice per calendar month, with payment for wages earned between the 1st and the 15th of the month paid no later than the 26th day of the month during which the labor was performed, and payment for wages earned between the 16th and last day of the month, inclusive, paid for no later than the 10th day of the following month. Other payroll periods such as weekly, biweekly (every two weeks), or semimonthly (twice per month) when the earning period is something other than between the 1st and 15th, and 16th and last day of the month, must be paid within seven calendar days of the end of the payroll period within which the wages were earned. If records are not available because of the fires, the employer should make a reasonable effort to determine the hours worked by the employees, and make payment accordingly as promptly as possible.

### **If an employer has employees working from home because the employer's offices were destroyed, what does the employer need to know and how does the employer get the needed information?**

Generally speaking, the same rules apply when employees work from a remote location as when they worked in the office. For example, employees who are considered non-exempt under the wage-and-hour laws should be required to keep track of all of the hours they work for payroll and overtime purposes. Employees who incur work-related expenses in the course and scope of performing their work for their employer must be reimbursed.

### **Does an employer have to reimburse its employees for the destruction or loss of any of their personal items, such as personal computers or cars that they may have used for business purposes?**

You should consult with your insurance provider to determine whether loss of employees' personal property is covered by any insurance policy. Ordinarily, employers are not responsible for reimbursing employees for the loss or damage to personal property which an employee chose to bring to the worksite.

### **Are employers able to obtain extensions for filing payroll taxes with the State of California due to the wildfires?**

Employers may be able to request an extension to file their state payroll taxes and deposit state payroll taxes with the California Employment Development Department (EDD) without penalty or interest, where the employer's delay can be attributed to the wildfires. A written request for extension must be received by the EDD within 60 days from the original delinquent date of the payment or return. For this purpose, state payroll taxes include unemployment insurance, employment training tax, state disability insurance, and California personal income tax. For the most updated information regarding extensions, employers should contact the EDD by either visiting the EDD's website at [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov) or by calling the EDD Taxpayer Assistance Center at (888) 745-3886.

## **Layoffs and Closing the Business**

### **Does an employer have to provide its employees with any prior notice of termination if the employer determines that it is necessary to lay off employees?**

Employers with established policies requiring that prior notice be given may be required to comply with their policies; however, due to the emergency circumstances of the wildfires, an employer may be relieved of its notice obligations. In addition, employers that do not have an established policy requiring that prior notice be given will not likely be required to provide any notice prior to termination due to the emergency circumstances of the wildfires. Usually, employers with more than 75 employees may have an obligation to provide certain notice to its employees pursuant to the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act and/or the state Cal-WARN Act. However, the WARN Act contains an exception from the notice requirement if the layoff or shutdown is the result of a natural disaster and the Cal-WARN Act provides an exception to the notice requirement in the event of a physical calamity.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

### **Does an employer have to provide its employees with severance pay if the employer decides to lay off employees?**

No, as long as the employer does not have a plan, policy, or practice providing for the payment of severance benefits. Neither California law, nor federal law, requires employers to provide severance pay to departing employees.

### **Is a self-employed small business owner eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits?**

No. Unfortunately, self-employed small business owners (sole proprietorships and members of a partnership or limited liability company) as well as independent contractors are not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. However, persons denied unemployment insurance benefits may be eligible for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA). For more information regarding DUA, go to [http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf\\_pub\\_ctr/de8714y.pdf](http://www.edd.ca.gov/pdf_pub_ctr/de8714y.pdf) and see the **Unemployment Benefits** section of the **Employment** chapter of this handbook above.

### **Is an employer personally liable for its employees' wages if the failing corporation is unable to make payroll?**

It can be. Under California law, employers are liable for various wage and hour violations and an employer is defined to include a natural person who is an owner, director, officer, or managing agent of the employer entity. In addition, under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), an employer is broadly defined as "any person acting directly or indirectly in the interest of an employer in relation to an employee."

## PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES

### What should I do first to address my personal finances?

If you haven't already, among the first things to do is to register for assistance. Registering online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) is the quickest way to register for FEMA assistance. If you are unable to access the Internet, you can also call (800) 621-3362. In addition to providing a way to register, the website provides lots of helpful information on mortgages for rebuilding, how to replace paper savings bonds, and many other valuable references.

Be sure to save all receipts for expenses incurred due to the disaster. This is important for insurance, taxes, and assistance programs.

### DEALING WITH CREDITORS, BANKS, AND CASH NEEDS

#### **Because of the wildfires, I may not be able to pay off some or all of my bills on time or make mortgage or other loan payments, especially in the short term. What should I do?**

You should immediately contact creditors, financial institutions, and any other parties to whom you owe or will owe money in the short term to alert them that you have been affected by the fires, discuss your specific circumstances with them, and request that payments be reduced or delayed while you attempt to recover. Many banks and lenders already have a hardship or natural disaster plan in place that they can apply to your account which may allow you to forego payment without it affecting your credit report for a few months. Some credit card lenders may have similar mechanisms and may also agree to provide increases to your credit limits. In both cases, consider whether you need to update your contact information. In all events, each financial institution will have different policies so take detailed notes about who you are speaking with and what they are saying and follow up any conversation with a letter or email that reiterates the substance of your conversation and any agreements reached during the conversation.

If you don't have your mortgage lender's contact information, your monthly mortgage statement, or coupon book with you, you can search the Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems (MERS) ([www.mers-servicerid.org/sis/](http://www.mers-servicerid.org/sis/)) or call toll free (888) 679-6377 to find the company that services your mortgage. Also, deed and mortgage records are maintained by the Clerk-Recorder's Office for the county where the property is located. If the deed or mortgage was filed for record, it will be accessible there. (For a list of contact information for County Recorder's Offices, see the **Document & Record Replacement** chapter of this handbook.)

If you have a California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) loan and have suffered damage caused by a disaster, contact CalVet at (800) 626-1613 or [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov). CalVet homeowner insurance also provides for temporary living expenses for evacuations.

Depending upon the type of loan you have, your lender may be willing to temporarily reduce or suspend your payments; this is referred to as *forbearance*. You may contact your lenders to see whether such forbearance relief has been or will be granted as a result of the wildfires and/or, if you have an FHA mortgage, you can contact the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) ([https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/housing/sfh/nsc/qaho0121](https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/housing/sfh/nsc/qaho0121)). If you have student loans, ask your student loan servicer if you qualify for a temporary forbearance. Federal student loan borrowers may be eligible for up to three months of forbearance.

In addition to the above steps, you can also contact the National Foundation for Credit Counseling at (800) 388-2227 or online at [www.nfcc.org](http://www.nfcc.org) to obtain credit counseling services.

#### **As a result of the wildfires, my credit card, ATM card, and/or checks and related statements were destroyed. What should I do?**

If you don't have an ATM card or your bank information, checks, or cards have been destroyed, the first step should be to contact a branch of your bank. Most banks and credit card companies have toll-free numbers to report lost or stolen cards. If you need replacement checks or bank statements but have no identification, you should go to the branch where you opened the account. For your bank's contact information or information on how to gain access to your funds, or to obtain additional information you can call the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) on its toll-free hotline from 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. ET, Monday – Friday, or from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. ET, Saturday and Sunday, at (877) ASK-FDIC or (877) 275-3342, or visit their website at [www.fdic.gov](http://www.fdic.gov).

When personal documents and credit cards are floating around, authorities suggest that people should be on guard against identity theft. This is addressed in the **Consumer Tips & Fraud Prevention** chapter of this handbook. In addition, you may want to add a free fraud alert on their credit report. To do this, contact TransUnion: (800) 680-7289

## PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES

([www.transunion.com/fraud-victim-resource/place-fraud-alert](http://www.transunion.com/fraud-victim-resource/place-fraud-alert)), Experian: (888) 397-3742 ([www.experian.com/fraud/center.html](http://www.experian.com/fraud/center.html)), or Equifax: (888) 766-0008 ([www.alerts.equifax.com](http://www.alerts.equifax.com)).

### **What happens if my bank has lost my records?**

Banks are required to have extensive contingency plans for all types of disruptions to operations, including natural disasters. Banks should therefore have backup systems of records and other built-in duplications that are housed in safe locations so financial records can be reconstructed and restored.

### **The local banks (or banks where I do not have an account) will not cash my checks or let me withdraw money from teller stations; what can I do?**

If you do not have a relationship with the bank, it may be concerned about whether there are sufficient funds in your account. Ask the local bank to call your bank to determine your account balance. You can also establish a new account with the local bank where you have relocated and then contact your prior bank to wire funds from your existing account to the new account. If you do not have the documents traditionally required to open a new account, such as a driver's license, you can ask a local bank if it has instituted any special programs for victims of the wildfires or you can call the FDIC hotline for more information at (877) 275-3342 (TDD line: (800) 925-4618) or visit their website at [www.fdic.gov](http://www.fdic.gov).

### **How can I deposit or cash any insurance checks that I may receive?**

If you receive checks, such as insurance payments, your bank should be able to receive the check or cash the check for you, even if your bank or its local branches have been affected by the wildfires. If your bank or its local branches are still not ready to receive checks, it is anticipated that arrangements will be made with neighboring banks to help you. Alternatively, you can contact another bank and ask about establishing a new account so you can deposit or cash your checks through that new account.

### **If my local bank was destroyed, is my money still insured?**

Yes, your money is still insured by the FDIC. Deposits with an FDIC-insured bank or savings institution will continue to be protected up to \$250,000 per depositor.

### **What about the contents of my safe deposit box? Does FDIC insurance cover safe deposit boxes?**

Deposit insurance does not cover safe deposit boxes, but you should check your homeowners insurance policy to see if it might. Also, most safe deposit boxes are held in the banks' vaults, which are fireproof and waterproof. If possible, contact the branch or office where your box was located to find out the condition of your box.

### **My regular direct deposit is not showing up in my account, and I need money. How can I clear this up with the bank?**

Sometimes there are delays in the processing of transactions, including direct deposits, as banks activate backup plans. The banks will process the transactions once these backup plans are implemented and your direct deposit may be among the transactions waiting to be processed. You should contact your bank to ask about your pending direct deposit. You can also contact the individual or entity that is making the deposit to ask whether it has any information or can provide you with an alternative payment.

### **If my ATM card does not work, what should I do?**

If your ATM card will not work, it may be because your bank's verification system is not working so check with your bank to determine if that is the case or whether they can otherwise assist you. You can also consider other options, such as cashing a check in the area where you are located or, if need be, using a credit card. You can also contact one of the emergency service organizations, such as FEMA or the Red Cross, and request assistance.

### **I need cash immediately and my ATM card is lost/stolen/destroyed. Will the bank let me get cash?**

You should call your financial institution to ask how you can access your account without an ATM card. Your bank may be able to wire transfer money to another financial institution that is convenient for you and can arrange to send you a replacement ATM card (if you have an address to receive a new card).

### **I have access to my bank account through an ATM, but the amount of money I can withdraw each day is limited. How can I withdraw more than the daily limit?**

Call or go to your bank, let them know you have been affected by the wildfires, and ask a manager about increasing your daily ATM withdrawal limit.

## PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES

### **I have my bills set up to automatically deduct payments from my account. I do not have enough money to cover those deductions. How do I go about stopping these payments?**

By law, you must call or write your bank requesting a stop on an automated debit at least three business days before the scheduled debit. If you make an oral request, the bank may require you to confirm it in writing within 14 days of your call and you should do so more quickly if you can and even if it is not a requirement. Because of the wildfires, your bank may also be willing to waive the three business day notification period or waive overdraft fees. Notify your bank about any errors within 60 days of the statement showing the error.

### **Do I need to continue to pay utilities and similar expenses if my house is damaged or destroyed?**

If your home is temporarily uninhabitable or totally destroyed, you should notify the utility company and other service companies, such as phone, water, garbage, and cable and Internet service providers so they can stop service provision and associated billing immediately. You should continue to make insurance, mortgage, and other payments.

### **What should I do if I need general financial assistance because I don't have enough money to pay for necessities?**

Please see the **Adjustments to Regular Government Benefits** chapter of this handbook.

### **What should I do if I don't receive my Social Security payment?**

Please see the **Adjustments to Regular Government Benefits** chapter of this handbook.

### **What can I do if I can't afford a down payment for a home lost in the wildfires?**

If you lost your home due to the wildfires you may be able to use an insured mortgage to finance the purchase or reconstruction of a single family home that will be your principal residence.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) Section 203(h) program offers features that make recovery from a disaster easier for homeowners (see [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/housing/sfh/ins/203h-dft](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/sfh/ins/203h-dft) for more information):

- No down payment is required. You must pay closing costs and prepaid expenses in cash or through premium pricing. Or the seller can pay them, subject to a 6% seller concessions limit.
- FHA mortgage insurance is not free. Lenders collect an up-front insurance premium from the borrowers (which may be financed) at the time of purchase, as well as monthly premiums that are not financed, but instead are added to the regular mortgage payment.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sets limits on the amount that may be insured. FHA sets limits on the dollar value of the mortgage, to make sure that its programs serve low and moderate income people. You can view the current FHA mortgage limits online at <https://entp.hud.gov/idapp/html/hicostlook.cfm>. These figures vary over time and by place, depending on the cost of living and other factors (higher limits also exist for two to four family properties).

(In addition, please see the **Housing** chapter of this handbook.)

### **Who do I contact if I have questions related to VA benefits?**

If you need information regarding VA death benefits, pensions, insurance settlements, or other information related to VA, contact the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at (800) 827-1000, or visit their Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) website at <https://iris.custhelp.com/app/home>.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### **I do not have a permanent address at this time. Can I still receive replacement documents or monthly account statements?**

If you are no longer at your home, you can have replacement documents sent to you as long as you have a fixed address. To file a forwarding request, you can go to Quick Tools on the U.S. Postal Service website, [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com), visit any post office, or call (800) 275-8777 (TDD/TTY: call (800) 877-8339 and ask for (800) 275-8777). In Quick Tools you also have the option to place your mail delivery on hold. To find out whether your post office is open and whether you will receive mail delivery, see <https://www.usps.com/>.

### Can I file for bankruptcy as a result of the wildfires?

The fires have not changed the requirements for filing for bankruptcy, so the answer really depends on the circumstances of your personal situation. By way of background, bankruptcy generally allows you to get rid of most of your debts, but it also requires you to use almost all of your assets (bank accounts, cars, stocks, etc.) to pay off as many (and as much of) of your debts as possible. Other bankruptcy options currently include keeping your assets but rescheduling your debts to pay them off over time. Although a bankruptcy filing can provide an individual with certain benefits, it is not without its costs: a bankruptcy filing will affect your credit score, may make it more difficult to get a mortgage or other loans, and usually does not wipe out fines, certain taxes, and most student loan obligations.

Bankruptcy is a serious decision that should only be made after careful consideration, preferably with the help of a lawyer qualified to give advice concerning bankruptcy issues. If you want to contact an attorney about bankruptcy and are about unsure about who to contact, State Bar-certified lawyer referral services are listed in the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.

### Am I entitled to a modification/reduction of my child support obligations because of my losses due to the wildfires?

Possibly. An uninsured catastrophic loss may be a basis for requesting a reduction in the child support you pay or for requesting an increase in the child support you receive. The change in your child support is not automatic. You must file a motion to request it. If you have an attorney for your child support case, you should contact him or her immediately. If you do not have an attorney, you may obtain assistance through the Office of the Family Law Facilitator. The Office of the Family Law Facilitator can be reached at the following local contact information:

**Sonoma:** [Sonoma County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at the Civil and Family Law Courthouse, 3055 Cleveland Avenue, Santa Rosa CA 95403, (707) 521-6545.

**Napa:** [Napa County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at 825 Brown Street, Napa, CA 94559, (707) 299-1137.

**Mendocino:** [Mendocino County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is at 100 North State Street, Room 212, Ukiah, CA 95482, (707) 463-5666.

**Butte:** [The Butte County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's offices](#) are located in Chico at 1775 Concord Avenue Chico, CA 95928, (530) 532-7024 or in Oroville at 1 Court Street, Oroville, CA 95965, (530) 532-7015.

**Lake:** [Lake County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at 7000-A South Center Drive, Clearlake, CA 95422, (707) 994-6598 Option #3.

**Nevada:** [Nevada County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at 201 Church Street, 1st Floor, Suite 9, Nevada City, CA 95959, (530) 470-2594.

**Yuba:** [Yuba County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at the Yuba County Courthouse, 215 5th Street, Suite 318, Marysville, CA 95901, (530) 740-1850.

**Solano:** [Solano County Superior Court Family Law Facilitator's office](#) is located at Fairfield Hall of Justice, 600 Union Ave., Fairfield, CA 94533. The Facilitator does not provide assistance over the phone but you can send an email to [FLF@solano.courts.ca.gov](mailto:FLF@solano.courts.ca.gov).

In addition, if you need to contact County Child Support Services, you can reach them through the state-wide phone number: (866) 901-3212.

### What if I need legal services and can't afford them?

Disaster Legal Services (DLS) which is part of FEMA provides legal assistance to low-income individuals who prior to or as a result of the disaster, are unable to secure legal services adequate to meet their disaster-related needs. Legal advice is limited to cases that will not produce a fee (cases where attorneys are paid part of the settlement, which is awarded by the court). There are limitations on conditions related to this service which can be found on a Disaster Legal Services Fact Sheet at [www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/24413](http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/24413). Other cases, including those that may generate a fee, are turned over to the local lawyer referral service. Please refer to the **FEMA** chapter of this handbook.

The assistance that local lawyers provide typically includes, among other things:

- help with insurance claims for doctor and hospital bills, loss of property, loss of life, etc.;
- preparing new wills, powers of attorney, and other legal documents lost in the disaster;
- help with home repair contracts and contractors; and
- advice on problems with landlords.

If you do not have a lawyer or cannot afford one, please see the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.

### TAXES

#### **Can I defer filing my tax returns and paying taxes as a result of the wildfires?**

In some cases, yes. The answer will depend on whether the relevant tax return and payment obligation are with the federal government or another authority (such as the State of California), and the relief offered by that specific authority.

The federal government has declared Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties as presidential disaster areas because of recent wildfires. As a result, individuals who reside in or have businesses in any of these counties may be entitled to extended federal tax filing and payment deadlines. (See <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-for-victims-of-wildfires-in-california> for more details.)

As of October 20, 2017, certain filing and payment deadlines that had an original or extended due date on or after October 8, 2017 and before January 31, 2018 have been extended. This extension applies to individual, corporate, and estate and trust income tax returns; partnership returns, S corporation returns, and trust returns; estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax returns; and employment and certain excise tax returns that had an original or extended due date on or after October 8, 2017 and before January 31, 2018. Further, as a result of the extension, failure to make estimated income tax payments originally due on or after October 8, 2017, and before January 31, 2018, will not result in penalties for failure to pay estimated tax installments as long as such payments are paid on or before January 31, 2018.

By contrast, no extension has been provided for information returns in the W-2, 1094, 1095, 1097, 1098, or 1099 series; Forms 1042-S, 3921, 3922 or 8027; or employment or excise tax deposits. For a complete list of extensions provided by the IRS, see Revenue Procedure 2007-56, available online at <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-irbs/irb07-34.pdf> (beginning on page 388). If an item is not listed as having an extension in this Revenue Procedure, then you should assume that no extension has been granted.

Before relying on the information above, you are strongly urged to obtain updated information by consulting your accountant or other tax advisor, checking the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), or calling the IRS at (800) 829-1040 (Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. local time).

For California taxes, the Franchise Tax Board (FTB) has announced special tax relief for California taxpayers impacted by the wildfires (see <https://www.ftb.ca.gov/aboutFTB/press/2017/09-10132017.shtml> for more details). Affected taxpayers are granted an extension to file 2016 California tax returns and make payments until January 31, 2018. For other filings, including estimated tax payments, the FTB appears to automatically follow federal postponement periods for any presidentially declared disasters. For more information, go to [www.ftb.ca.gov](http://www.ftb.ca.gov).

In addition to obtaining extensions, you may be able to reduce one or more tax liabilities based on property loss you have suffered as a result of wildfires. Please see the response to the next question below for further information.

#### **My property was damaged. Does this reduce how much federal income tax I will owe?**

You may be able to lower your federal income tax liabilities by taking “casualty loss” deductions for property damaged or destroyed due to casualties, such as the wildfires. The amount of your deduction depends on your adjusted gross income, the nature of your property (personal-use versus business-use), your basis in the property, and in the case of business-use property, whether the property is completely destroyed. Because the rules described below are complicated, you should consult with your accountant or tax advisor about them if you can; you can also contact the IRS at (800) 829-1040 (Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. local time) or the FTB at (800) 852-5711 (Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) for assistance.

Calculating your casualty loss deductions for personal-use property requires measuring the loss separately for each item of damaged or destroyed property. If your land or any of your buildings were damaged or destroyed, you should generally calculate your loss and your basis by treating the real property and buildings as a single item of property for this purpose. The amount of loss for each piece of personal property that was damaged should generally be calculated separately. The amount of casualty losses for a piece of damaged or destroyed property should generally equal the amount of the decline in value of the relevant property. You will not be able to deduct this full amount. Instead, you must first reduce the loss for each piece of property by any insurance or other reimbursement you receive or expect to receive in respect of that property. Second, the amount of loss for each piece of property should be further reduced by another \$100 (but it should not be reduced below zero). The amount of the casualty loss deduction for the piece of property in question will equal the resulting amount unless the resulting amount exceeds your “basis” in the property. If the resulting amount is greater than your basis, then your deduction must be reduced so that it equals your basis in the relevant property. An individual's basis in personal-use property usually equals the amount that was paid for that property.

## PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES

Casualty losses for personal-use property are “itemized” deductions, which means that they are not available if you take a “standard” deduction. Further, personal casualty loss deductions can be used only to the extent that they exceed the sum of (i) any “personal casualty gains” and (ii) 10% of your adjusted gross income for the relevant tax year. Solely for purposes of calculating this sum, you may deduct all personal casualty loss deductions to the extent that they equal your personal casualty gains. Generally, personal casualty gains will equal the excess of any insurance proceeds you receive in respect of a piece of property over that property’s basis.

With respect to casualty losses of business or income-producing property (such as rental property), the amount you may deduct depends on whether the property is completely destroyed. If it is not completely destroyed, first determine: (1) the decrease in the fair market value of the property as a result of the casualty and (2) your adjusted tax basis in the property, and then, from the smaller of these two amounts, subtract any insurance or other reimbursement you received or expect to receive. Conversely, if the property is completely destroyed, your loss is your adjusted basis in the property, reduced by any salvage value and any insurance or other reimbursement you received or expect to receive.

If your property is covered by insurance (regardless of whether it is personal-use or business-use property), you should file a timely insurance claim for reimbursement of the loss. Otherwise, you will not be able to deduct the amount of the loss for which you failed to claim coverage. (This does not apply to any portion of the loss not covered by insurance.)

According to the IRS website at <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-for-victims-of-wildfires-in-california>, you have the option of claiming fire-related casualty losses on your federal income tax return for either 2016 or 2017. Claiming such casualty losses on an amended return for 2016 may qualify you for a refund now, but waiting to claim the losses on your 2017 return could result in a greater tax saving, depending on other income factors. If you want to claim such casualty losses on an amended return for 2016, you should write “Disaster-Northern CA Wildfires 2017” in red ink at the top of the amended return.

For more information on casualty losses, please refer to IRS Publication 2194, “Disaster Losses Kit for Individuals – Help From the IRS,” or IRS Publication 2194B, “Disaster Losses Kit for Business – Help from the IRS.” These publications contain information about IRS tax services, forms and publications that will assist you with your loss. In addition, you may also need the following forms and publications:

- Form 1040X, “Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return”
- Form 1120X, “Amended U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return”
- Form 4684, “Casualties and Thefts”
- Topic 507, “Casualty and Theft Losses”
- Topic 515, “Casualty, Disaster, and Theft Losses”
- Publication 536, “Net Operating Losses (NOLs) for Individuals, Estates, and Trusts”
- Publication 547, “Casualties, Disasters, and Thefts”
- Publication 584, “Casualty, Disaster, and Theft Loss Workbook (Personal-Use Property)”
- Publication 584B, “Business Casualty, Disaster, and Theft Loss Workbook”

You may download and print IRS forms and publications from the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Additionally, you are again encouraged to consult with an accountant, tax lawyer, or other tax advisor, as the rules governing casualty loss deductions are complex.

**Note:** *With respect to property taxes on real property damaged or destroyed in the wildfires, see the **Housing** chapter of this handbook. With respect to California state income taxes, see the next question immediately below. To determine whether insurance proceeds are taxable, see the second question below (“Will I be taxed on my insurance proceeds?”).*

### **Can I take a deduction on my California state income taxes for my personal property that has been lost, damaged, or destroyed?**

Taxpayers may claim a deduction on their California state income tax returns for a disaster loss sustained in an area proclaimed by the governor to be in a state of emergency. For a complete list of all disasters declared by the governor, see the “Qualified Disasters” chart on FTB’s Disaster Loss web page at <https://www.ftb.ca.gov/individuals/disaster.shtml>. Additional information and instructions are available in FTB Pub. 1034 at <https://www.ftb.ca.gov/forms/misc/1034.pdf>, “How to Claim a State Tax Deduction for Your Disaster Loss.”

California disaster-loss rules apply to victims in governor-declared or presidentially declared disaster areas. Taxpayers may claim a disaster loss in one of two ways: (1) they may claim the disaster loss in the tax year that the disaster occurred, when they file their 2017 tax return next spring, or (2) taxpayers may claim the loss in the tax year before the disaster occurred by filing either an amended or original 2016 tax return. The advantage of claiming the disaster loss in the prior tax year is that the FTB can more quickly issue a refund, but waiting to claim the losses on your 2017 return could result in a greater tax saving, depending on other income factors. In order to expedite your refund, you should print the name of the disaster (for example, “Disaster-Tubbs Fire, Napa County, 2017”) in red ink at the top of side 1 of the



## PERSONAL FINANCES & TAXES

return. If you e-file your tax return, you should follow the software instructions to enter the information above when prompted.

Taxpayers whose losses exceed their income *may* qualify for 100% carryover of any excess casualty loss to future taxable years. However, this will first require the California Legislature to enact legislation adding the wildfires to the list of eligible disasters for such treatment. At the time of printing of this handbook, the Legislature had not yet enacted such legislation. For the latest information, please check the California Franchise Tax Board's website at [www.ftb.ca.gov](http://www.ftb.ca.gov) or call (800) 852-5711.

### **Will I be taxed on my insurance proceeds?**

It depends. You may be able to offset proceeds from insurance relating to property damage against the adjusted basis of the damaged property (generally your basis will equal the price you paid for the relevant property, minus any depreciation deductions). In that case, you would be taxed only to the extent that your insurance proceeds exceed your basis, and you may be able to elect to defer recognition of that income (i.e., defer paying taxes on it) if you use the proceeds to purchase similar property within a specified time period. If you receive insurance proceeds for a loss for which you have already claimed a casualty loss deduction, the insurance proceeds will generally be taxable in the year of receipt. Additional rules apply if the amount received exceeds the amount of the claimed deduction. The rules relating to insurance recoveries are complicated. You are strongly encouraged to consult a tax advisor when filing tax returns for periods during which you received insurance proceeds or for which you are electing to defer gain.

### **If I receive a grant from a federal or state program, charitable organization, or employer to cover medical, transportation, or temporary housing expenses, is it taxable?**

Generally no, but other types of relief payments may be taxable (see the following question). If you are in an area declared a disaster due to the fire, you generally do not have to include any of the following receipts in gross income, unless the same expenses are also reimbursed to you through insurance or otherwise through:

- grants for reasonable and necessary personal, family, living, or funeral expenses incurred as a result of the fire;
- grants for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred for the repair or rehabilitation of a personal residence, or for the repair or replacement of its contents, to the extent attributable to the fire; and
- payments made by a federal, state, or local government in connection with the fire.

### **Are other relief payments taxable?**

Generally, yes. You generally do have to include in gross income the following relief payments:

- grants or other relief payments for expenses for which you are also reimbursed by insurance or otherwise; and
- payments in the nature of income replacement, for example, payments to individuals of lost wages, unemployment compensation, and business income replacement.

### **Where can I get more tax-related information?**

- The IRS: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or (800) 829-1040 (individuals), (800) 829-4933 (businesses), (800) 829-4059 (TTY/TDD)
- The State of California Franchise Tax Board: [www.ftb.ca.gov](http://www.ftb.ca.gov) or (800) 338-0505 or (800) 852-5711
- The State of California Board of Equalization: [www.boe.ca.gov](http://www.boe.ca.gov) or (800) 400-7115 and see <http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/faqs/disaster.htm> for FAQs on Disaster Relief.

NOTE that although the information provided in this handbook is based on the general tax provisions applicable to presidentially declared disasters such as the wildfires, it is possible that more specific administrative or legislative guidance will be released in the future that alters the tax provisions described herein. Accordingly, you are strongly urged to obtain updated information by consulting your accountant or other tax advisor, checking the IRS website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), or calling the IRS at (800) 829-1040 (individuals) or (800) 829-4933 (businesses) (Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. local time).

## ADJUSTMENTS TO REGULAR GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

### SOCIAL SECURITY

**For direct deposit:** If your Social Security check is automatically deposited into your bank account, your Social Security payment will be scheduled to be deposited into your account as usual. However, if you experience any difficulty getting your payment, you can go to any open Social Security office and request an immediate payment. For more information on the nearest open Social Security office, you can call (800) 772-1213 (TTY: (800) 325-0778) or visit <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps6z/FOLO/Controller>. To see office closures visit <https://www.ssa.gov/agency/emergency/>.

If you have moved to a new area and want to open a new account with a local bank, contact the Social Security Administration with the routing information of your new account. The staff at the bank where you open the new account should be able to help you make this change. If you have temporarily relocated to a fixed address, you should contact the USPS on the Internet at [www.usps.gov/](http://www.usps.gov/) or call their toll-free 24-hour hotline to file a forwarding address: (800) ASK-USPS.

### UNEMPLOYMENT

The State of California provides special assistance when people affected by disasters are unemployed or lose their jobs. For more information about Unemployment Insurance and Disaster Unemployment Assistance, please see the **Employment** chapter of this handbook. You can also call (800) 300-5616 (English), (800) 326-8937 (Spanish), (800) 547-3506 (Cantonese), (866) 303-0706 (Mandarin), (800) 547-2058 (Vietnamese), or (800) 815-9387 (TTY). <http://www.edd.ca.gov/unemployment/>.

### ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER (EBT) CARDS

For help in obtaining a replacement EBT card, call (877) 328-9677 or visit <https://www.ebt.ca.gov/caebtclient/lostcard.jsp>.

### FOOD STAMP (CALFRESH) RECIPIENTS

If you need food, whether or not you are already a CalFresh recipient, you may qualify for Disaster CalFresh (also known as "D-CalFresh"). If you are not already a recipient but were impacted by the wildfires, you may qualify for a temporary month of benefits if you satisfy certain income limits for income received during this period. You may apply in person at your local county social services agency. Please see the phone numbers and websites below.

If you are already a recipient of CalFresh (federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)), you may be eligible for benefits to replace food that was lost due to fire, loss of electricity, etc. The government is automatically issuing a mass replacement of 60% of October 2017 SNAP benefits in Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties for SNAP/CalFresh households affected by the wildfires in the zip codes listed below. That means that if you are in one of the following zip codes and are already a SNAP/CalFresh recipient, you will automatically receive a 60% credit to your EBT card.

- Lake County: 95424, 95443, and 95458
- Mendocino County: 95469 and 95470
- Napa County: 94581 and 94558
- Nevada County: 95946 and 95975
- Sonoma County: 95452, 94515, 95492, 95442, 95403, 95406, 95439, 95409, and 95433
- Yuba County: 95918, 95922, 95962, 95972, and 95977

If you lost more than 60% of your food or do not live in one of the above zip codes but lost food, you can submit an affidavit to make a request for replacement SNAP/CalFresh benefits. The government may be expanding the automatic supplementation and is actively updating information on Disaster CalFresh, including new information about deadlines, locations, and supplementation, on its website at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalFresh/Disaster-CalFresh>.

For more information, please call (877) 847-3663 or visit <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalFresh/Disaster-CalFresh>, or contact your county social services agency:

- Butte County: (877) 410-8803 (<http://www.buttecounty.net/dess/ConnectDESS.aspx>)
- Lake County: (707) 995-4200 (<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/>)

## ADJUSTMENTS TO REGULAR GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

- Mendocino County: (<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/>)
  - Fort Bragg: (707) 962-1000
  - Willits: (707) 456-3700
  - Ukiah: (707) 463-7700
- Napa County: (800) 464-4214 (<http://countyofnapa.org/HHSA/>)
- Nevada County: (<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/879/Social-Services>)
  - Nevada City: (530) 265-1340
  - Truckee: (530) 582-7803
  - Grass Valley: (888) 809-1340
- Orange County: (800) 281-9799 (<http://ssa.ocgov.com>)
- Sonoma County: (877) 699-6868 (<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Human-Services/>)
- Yuba County: (877) 652-0739 (<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/HHSD/>)

## CALWORKS RECIPIENTS

If your family currently receives assistance from CalWORKs, you may be eligible for additional assistance if you were impacted by the wildfires. Families impacted by the wildfires that currently receive assistance from the CalWORKs program may also be eligible for a one-time, non-recurring special needs assistance payment of up to \$600. To qualify for this special payment, you must have an emergency need due to sudden and unusual circumstances beyond your control and \$100 or less in liquid resources. If you qualify for a special needs assistance payment, the money can be used to repair or replace clothing or household items, provide assistance for damage to your home, including moving or storage payments due to such damage, or pay for interim shelter if your home is destroyed or made uninhabitable or inaccessible. You should contact your case worker for additional information.

If you are homeless, you have the option to apply for temporary and permanent housing assistance. Applicant families who have already received homeless assistance in the last 12 months who have been impacted by the wildfires may be entitled to an exception to the once every 12 months limit. You may also be eligible for an immediate needs payment of up to \$200 if you have \$100 or less in non-exempt liquid resources (for example, cash). Please note with respect to the above that CalWORKs regulations also exclude federal disaster and emergency assistance. Therefore, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relief, American Red Cross relief, and D-CalFresh will not impact your eligibility for CalWORKs.

For additional information regarding your CalWORKs benefits, please contact your county's social services agency:

- Butte County: (877) 410-8803 (<http://www.buttecounty.net/dess/ConnectDESS.aspx>)
- Lake County: (707) 995-4200 (<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/>)
- Mendocino County: (<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/>)
  - Fort Bragg: (707) 962-1000
  - Willits: (707) 456-3700
  - Ukiah: (707) 463-7700
- Napa County: (800) 464-4214 (<http://countyofnapa.org/HHSA/>)
- Nevada County: (<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/879/Social-Services>)
  - Nevada City: (530) 265-1340
  - Truckee: (530) 582-7803
  - Grass Valley: (888) 809-1340
- Orange County: (<http://ssa.ocgov.com>)
- Sonoma County: (<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Human-Services/>)
- Yuba County: (877) 652-0739 (<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/HHSD/>)

For a complete list of CalWORKs offices, please visit: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/County-Offices>.

## VETERANS' BENEFITS

If you currently receive benefit payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) via electronic funds transfer (electronic deposit), payment will be made to your account as usual. For contact information, call (800) 827-1000 or visit the nearest VA benefits office in Oakland at 1301 Clay St., North Tower, Oakland, CA 94612. The office is open Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Information about your benefits can also be obtained at <http://www.vba.va.gov>.

## IMMIGRATION

The information below is meant to provide some basic answers to immigration questions and related issues. Individuals with immigration-related questions are strongly encouraged to consult an attorney since this is a complicated area of law. Please see the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook, for legal services available in your area.

### ELIGIBILITY FOR RELIEF

#### **Do I need to be a U.S. citizen or lawfully present immigrant to apply for disaster relief?**

FEMA non-emergency monetary disaster assistance and unemployment assistance programs are available only to U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals, and “qualified aliens” (which includes people with lawful permanent resident status with a Permanent Resident Card, referred to herein as a “Green Card,” as well as certain other immigrants). The **FEMA** chapter of this handbook describes these programs in detail. If any member of the household is eligible, including a minor child, the household may be eligible, and, as of October 20, 2017, FEMA’s website indicates that no information regarding the status of other household members will be gathered.

All individuals affected by the disaster, regardless of their immigration status, may qualify for certain short-term non-monetary emergency assistance from FEMA if it is necessary to prevent injury or death. Such assistance may include evacuation, emergency medical care, emergency shelter, search and rescue, and emergency food, water, and medicine.

Given that all people fleeing a disaster may lack paperwork, agencies should be flexible about what they accept from disaster survivors. Under a California law (Cal. Gov. Code § 8596(b)), state employees are required to provide assistance to survivors of a disaster without asking for information or documents that are not strictly necessary to determine eligibility under state or federal law. In addition, private and non-profit organizations, such as the American Red Cross, should be providing services to all survivors regardless of their status. Contact the Red Cross at <http://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief/wildfire-relief>. Another resource is UndocuFund, an organization raising money to help provide direct assistance to undocumented victims of the wildfires. More information about UndocuFund can be found on its website: <http://undocufund.org/>. You may also contact one of the legal services organizations in the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook if you have questions.

#### **I am undocumented but my child was born in the U.S. Is my child eligible to receive disaster relief?**

If you have a minor child who is a U.S. citizen or a “qualified alien” residing with you, you can apply for FEMA assistance on your child’s behalf. As of October 20, 2017, FEMA’s website indicates that no information regarding your status will be gathered as part of the application process for your child. However, you will be asked to sign a declaration that your child is eligible as a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or “qualified alien”. You may also be required to provide his or her Social Security number.

### LOST DOCUMENTATION

#### **My Green Card was damaged or destroyed by the wildfires. What can I do to replace it?**

If your Green Card was damaged or destroyed, you must replace it as soon as possible. To replace your Green Card you must fill out a USCIS Form I-90. To fill out this form you must use your complete name, Alien Registration Number (also known as an A-number) and date of admission into the United States. If you do not have this information, you can make an appointment to see a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS (formerly known as INS)) officer at <https://my.uscis.gov/appointment>, using USCIS’s INFOPASS system.

Once you have this information, you can fill out Form I-90. All paper I-90 forms must be mailed to one of these addresses (based on carrier): (A) for the United States Postal Service – USCIS, P.O. Box 21262, Phoenix, AZ 85036; and (B) for FedEx, UPS, and DHL – USCIS, Attention I-90, 1820 E. Skyharbor, Circle S, Floor 1, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85034. You may also file the Form I-90 electronically if you have a credit card in your name or your spouse’s name. Form I-90 is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-90> or you may call the USCIS forms request line at (800) 870-3676. You may also pick up the form in person at the San Francisco District Office, the address for which is provided below.

The filing fee for the I-90 is \$540.00, which includes an \$85 biometric (fingerprint) fee. All checks or money orders are payable to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Additionally, you may file a Form I-912 fee waiver (available at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-912>) if you are eligible for a complete or partial fee waiver based on annual income, receipt of means-tested benefits (e.g., SNAP/CalFresh, TANF/CalWORKs, or SSI), and can demonstrate financial hardship. The Form I-90 must be filed by mail if accompanied by a Form I-912 fee waiver.

## IMMIGRATION

Once a paper Form I-90 has been received by USCIS via mail, a receipt will be issued to you within one to two months. Such receipt is generated immediately upon filing the Form I-90 electronically. You will generally receive a biometric appointment within two months of filing. When you go to this biometric appointment, you will also need to bring an identity document, such as a driver's license, passport, or a copy of another document containing your name, date of birth, photograph, and signature. The total processing time for the Form I-90 is approximately 12 months.

### **How can I obtain temporary proof that I am a lawful permanent resident while my Form I-90 is being processed?**

Once you have the Form I-90 filing receipt, you may request what is known as an I-551 stamp. This I-551 stamp is legal proof of your lawful permanent residency status and is valid for both travel and employment purposes. *Please note that an I-551 stamp is required for you to travel outside the United States.* To request this stamp, make an INFOPASS appointment at <https://my.uscis.gov/appointment>. Bring your passport to your appointment so the USCIS officer can place the stamp on your passport. If you don't have a valid passport at the time of your appointment, bring two passport photos taken within 30 days of your appointment. The USCIS officer will create an I-94 document with the I-551 stamp, which will serve as temporary proof of lawful permanent residency status for a period of one year from issuance. There is no fee associated with the I-551 stamp.

### **My Naturalization Certificate was destroyed by the wildfires. What can I do to replace it?**

If your Naturalization Certificate or Citizenship Certificate (Citizenship Paper) was destroyed, you must replace it as soon as possible by filing a USCIS Form N-565 by mail or electronically on the USCIS website. Form N-565 is available online at <https://www.uscis.gov/n-565> or through the USCIS form request phone number at (800) 870-3676. You use your full name, A-number, and Certificate Number to fill out the N-565 form. If you do not have this information, you will need to make an appointment with a USCIS officer at <https://my.uscis.gov/appointment> using the INFOPASS system.

You will need to mail the completed Form N-565 to the following address: USCIS, Nebraska Service Center, P.O. Box 87565, Lincoln, NE 68501-7565. Two passport-sized photos taken within 30 days of filing must be included with your form. The filing fee for Form N-565 is \$555. All checks or money orders are payable to the Department of Homeland Security. You may file a Form I-912 fee waiver alongside your Form N-565 if you are eligible for a complete or partial fee waiver based on annual income, receipt of means-tested benefits (e.g., SNAP, TANF, or SSI), and can demonstrate financial hardship.

Once a completed Form N-565 has been received by USCIS, a receipt will be issued within one to two months. The total processing time for the Form N-565 is approximately six months. The Form N-565 can be expedited in emergency situations – if required, please speak to a USCIS officer about this procedure and make sure to bring the Form N-565 filing receipt.

### **What can I do to replace a lost work permit?**

To replace a lost work permit you must fill out and submit Form I-765 by mail. The form is available online at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> or by calling the USCIS form request phone number at (800) 870-3676. Along with the completed form, you must include a photocopy of any applications or documents that entitle you to obtain a work permit, such as an application for asylum, suspension of deportation, or adjustment of status. Please check the USCIS website to determine the proper mailing address for your particular immigration status. For further information regarding the replacement of your lost work permit, please contact USCIS at <https://www.uscis.gov> or call (800) 375-5283 (TDD line: (800) 767-1833). The Form I-765 can be expedited in emergency situations – if required, please speak to a USCIS officer about this procedure and make sure to bring the Form I-765 filing receipt and any papers you have from your employer.

Depending on your status, you may also have to pay a \$410 filing fee (an additional \$85 for biometric services may apply in certain circumstances). Additionally, you may file a Form I-912 fee waiver if you are eligible for a complete or partial fee waiver based on annual income, receipt of means-tested benefits (e.g., SNAP, TANF, or SSI), and can demonstrate financial hardship.

## INTERACTION WITH USCIS

### **Do I need to let USCIS know that I have moved as a result of the wildfires?**

All non-U.S. citizens are required to promptly notify the USCIS of any change of address. To report a change of address, you must file a Form AR-11, which is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/ar-11> or by calling the USCIS form request phone number at (800) 870-3676. Form AR-11 may be filed by mail or electronically at <https://egov.uscis.gov/coa/displayCOAForm.do>. Alternatively, if you complete a paper Form AR-11, the completed form must be mailed to the following address: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Citizenship and Immigration Services, Attn: Change of Address, 1344 Pleasants Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22801. In most cases, filing this form will update the information for any case you have pending, but you should check the USCIS website for confirmation. There is no fee for filing a Form AR-11. If you have pending immigration court proceedings, you will need to file Form EOIR-33/IC (Alien's

## IMMIGRATION

Change of Address Form/Immigration Court) which is available at <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-downloadable-eoir-forms>. If you do not have a permanent address as a result of the natural disaster, you will need to provide the address of a trusted family member or friend.

### **Where is my local USCIS office?**

There are three field offices in Northern California in San Francisco, Sacramento, and San Jose.

San Francisco Field Office  
444 Washington St.  
San Francisco, CA 94111

The San Francisco Field Office requires appointments, which can be made through the website on INFOPASS (<https://my.uscis.gov/appointment>) or by calling (800) 375-5283. For more information about this office, please visit its website: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office/field-offices/california-san-francisco-field-office>.

Sacramento Field Office  
650 Capitol Mall  
Sacramento, CA 95814

San Jose Field Office  
1450 Coleman Ave.  
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Please check the websites for the Sacramento and San Jose Field Offices, for further information about these locations:

Sacramento: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office/field-offices/california-sacramento-field-office>

San Jose: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office/field-offices/california-san-jose-field-office>

### **I missed my USCIS appointment due to the wildfires. What do I do?**

The USCIS website has announced that the USCIS San Francisco Field Office will automatically reschedule applicants who missed naturalization (N-400) or adjustment of status (I-485) interviews due to the wildfires or evacuation orders. This policy will remain active only until evacuation orders and road closures are lifted in affected counties. USCIS does not require applicants to contact the office and will mail a notice to applicants who miss their interviews. Anyone who misses an INFOPASS appointment may also reschedule the appointment online or go to the office where the appointment was originally scheduled with the appointment notice. If your appointment is with the Sacramento Field Office, San Jose Field Office, or any other USCIS field or district office, please ensure that you contact the appropriate office to reschedule your appointment. Please check the USCIS website for updates. If you have any doubt about whether your appointment has been rescheduled, you should contact USCIS as soon as possible to confirm.

## DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT

**A number of my personal records and identification cards (Social Security card, tax returns, passport, driver's license, etc.) were destroyed as a result of the wildfires. What should I do?**

### Social Security Card

You should apply to the Social Security Administration for a replacement Social Security card. To apply, mail or bring the following documents to your local Social Security office:

- Form SS-5, which is available at your local Social Security office, online at [www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.html), or can be mailed to you upon request by calling (800) 772-1213;
- one document providing evidence of your identity, such as your U.S. driver's license, U.S. state-issued non-driver identity card, U.S. passport, U.S. military identity card, Certificate of Naturalization, employee identity card, certified copy of medical record (uncertified may be okay for young children), health insurance card, Medicaid card, school identity card or school record, or final adoption decree; and
- if you were born outside the U.S., evidence of your U.S. citizenship or current lawful immigration status, such as a U.S. passport, Certificate of Citizenship, Certificate of Naturalization, or unexpired document issued to you by the Department of Homeland Security showing your current immigration status, such as Form I-551, I-94, or I-766.

The documents presented as evidence must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. Uncertified or notarized photocopies will not be accepted. Requests usually take two weeks to process. If you cannot provide the evidentiary documents, call (800) 772-1213 (TTY (800) 325-0778).

To find your local Social Security office, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/locator](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/locator) or call (800) 772-1213.

### Medicare Card

If your Medicare card was destroyed, you should also apply to the Social Security Administration for a replacement card. There is no charge for this service. You can request a replacement card at your local Social Security office, online at [www.socialsecurity.gov/medicarecard](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/medicarecard), or by telephone at (800) 772-1213 (TTY: (800) 325-0778). Requests usually take 30 days to process. If you need proof right away that you have Medicare, contact your local Social Security office or call the toll-free number noted above, and the office can provide you with proof of coverage that you can use until you receive your replacement Medicare card.

### Federal Income Tax Returns

Copies of your federal income tax returns may be obtained from your tax preparer or the IRS. Alternatively, transcripts of your federal income tax returns may also be obtained from the IRS. (Transcripts are computer-created records of returns which include most of the line items as filed with the IRS, including any accompanying forms and schedules.)

To apply for a copy of a tax return from the IRS, complete Form 4506, "Request for Copy of Tax Form" (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f4506.pdf>), write "California, Wildfires" in red ink at the top of the form, and send it to the address indicated in the instructions on the form. To apply for a transcript of a tax return from the IRS, complete Form 4506-T, "Request for Transcript of Tax Return" (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f4506t.pdf>), write "California, Wildfires" in red ink at the top of the form, and send it to the address indicated on the instructions to the form. Both forms may be obtained online at the links listed above or by calling (866) 562-5227 (Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. local time). Copies and transcripts of tax returns from the IRS are free and expedited for affected taxpayers.

### State Income Tax Returns

To get a free copy of your lost or damaged California state returns, you should complete Form FTB 3516, "Request for Copy of Tax Return" (<https://www.ftb.ca.gov/forms/misc/3516.pdf>). Write the name of the specific fire, your county, and 2017 in red ink at the top of the request (e.g., "Tubbs Fire, Napa County, 2017"). You may download the form at the link listed above or order one by calling (800) 852-5711.

### Passport

Information and forms about reporting and replacing a lost U.S. passport are available online at <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/lost-stolen.html> or through the U.S. Passport Information Center at

## DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT

(877) 487-2778 (TDD/TTY: (888) 874-7793). You must file a statement regarding the lost or stolen passport with Form DS-64 (<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/passports/Forms/Form%20Upload%208.1.17/ds64.pdf>) as well as file for a new passport with Form DS-11 (<https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/passports/Forms/Form%20Upload%208.1.17/ds11.pdf>). If you have your passport but it is damaged, you must submit a signed statement explaining the damaged or mutilated condition of the passport, and the damaged passport should be submitted with Form DS-11. If your passport was issued by a country other than the United States, you should contact that country's consulate and file an application for a replacement passport.

### Immigration Documents

For information on how to replace your Green Card or certain other immigration documents, please see the **Immigration** chapter of this handbook.

### California Driver's License/ID Card

For a limited time period, you may be able to replace at no cost the following items if damaged due to the wildfires: driver's licenses, identification cards, vehicle registrations and titles, and disabled person parking placards. In addition, you can acquire substitute license plates and stickers, vehicle disposal paperwork, and driver record printouts, as well as process a change of address. Replacement of these documents may be expedited by going in person to a local assistance center (LAC) or a disaster recovery center (DRC). Please see the **Disaster Help Centers** chapter of this handbook for more information. You can also receive support at local DMV field offices, by calling DMV customer service at (800) 777-0133 (TTY (800) 368-4327), during business hours, or by visiting [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov), and identifying yourself as a wildfire victim.

To replace your California driver's license and/or identification card, unless otherwise advised at an LAC or DRC, you can make an appointment to visit your local DMV office either online at <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/portal/foa/welcome> or by calling (800) 777-0133 (TTY: (800) 368-4327). You must submit application Form DL 44 (available at your local DMV or order by phone at (800) 777-0133 (TTY: (800) 368-4327)), give a thumb print, have your picture taken, and, unless waived due to the wildfires, pay the application fee (\$27.00 for license, \$29.00 for ID card, or free for a senior citizen ID card). You will be issued an interim license and/or receipt for your ID card until you receive your new card in the mail.

### Certificate of Title (Cars, Boats/Vessels)

For a limited time period, you may be able to replace vehicle registration and title at no cost. Replacement of these documents may be expedited by going in person to an LAC or a DRC. Please see the **Disaster Help Centers** chapter of this handbook for more information. You also can receive support at local DMV field offices, by calling DMV customer service at (800) 777-0133 (TTY: (800) 368-4327), during business hours, or by visiting [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov), and identifying yourself as a wildfire victim.

To obtain a replacement certificate of title, you must complete an Application for Duplicate or Paperless Title REG 227 ([https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/?1dmy&urile=wcm:path:dmv\\_content\\_en/dmv/forms/reg/reg227](https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/?1dmy&urile=wcm:path:dmv_content_en/dmv/forms/reg/reg227)), attach the damaged title if mutilated, and, unless waived due to the wildfires, pay the duplicate title fee of \$20.00 (\$15.00 for boats/vessels). REG 227 may be obtained online at the link listed above or at your local DMV. Unless otherwise advised at a DRC, you may submit the application either in person at your local DMV office or mail it to:

Department of Motor Vehicles  
Registration Operations  
P.O. Box 942869 Mail Station E-254  
Sacramento, CA 94269-0001

Instructions are available at <http://www.dmv.ca.gov>.

### Birth Certificates, Marriage Certificates, Death Certificates, and Divorce Decrees

For a limited time, certified copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates and divorce records will be provided free of charge. These records may be obtained by going in person to an LAC or DRC. Please see the **Disaster Help Centers** chapter of this handbook for more information. You may also go in person to the applicable County Recorder's office to obtain the records free of charge by identifying yourself as a wildfire victim.



## DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT

Certified copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates can be obtained from the County Recorder's office in the county where the birth, marriage, or death occurred. You must fill out an application with information such as the full name of the person, date of event, and place of event. Unless waived due to the wildfires, a fee in the amount of \$25.00 to \$30.00 for a birth certificate, \$15.00 to \$17.00 for a marriage certificate, or \$21.00 to \$23.00 for a death certificate, is also required. If you need the documents quickly, you should go directly to the Recorder's office to apply for the certificate. A list of the County Recorders' offices in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Solano, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties is provided at the end of this chapter.

Certified copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates can also be obtained from the Office of Vital Records by mailing your request to:

California Department of Public Health  
Vital Records – MS 5103  
P.O. Box 997410  
Sacramento, CA 95899-7410

Instructions and forms for requesting such certified copies are available at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHSI/Pages/Vital-Records.aspx>.

To replace a divorce decree or judgment, contact the clerk of the court in the county where the judgment was issued. Procedures vary from court to court. To find the location, phone number, and website of the superior court, visit <http://www.courts.ca.gov/find-my-court.htm>.

### Military Service Records

Instructions for requesting military service records online, by mail, or by fax can be found at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>.

For priority service to replace a Separation Document (usually DD Form 214 or equivalent), write "California Wildfires" in the "Comments" section of eVetRecs or in the "Purpose" section of Form SF-180, Request Pertaining to Military Records. Fax your request to customer service at (314) 801-9195.

### Immunization Records

Immunization records for yourself or your child may be obtained from the California Immunization Registry (CAIR). Go to <http://cairweb.org/wheres-my-immunization-record/> for information. To request a record, fill out this form: <http://cairweb.org/docs/CAIR2AuthorizationToRelease.pdf>. For fastest service, fax the request to (888) 436-8320 or email to [CAIRHelpDesk@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:CAIRHelpDesk@cdph.ca.gov). The request may also be mailed to:

California Dept. of Public Health, Immunization Branch  
850 Marina Bay Parkway  
Building P, 2nd Fl.  
Richmond, CA 94804-6403

If immunization records are not found in CAIR, look for copies kept by the physician or medical group that administered the immunizations, at your local health department, or at your child's school.

### **As a result of the wildfires, records related to real property I own (such as the deed to my house) were destroyed. What should I do?**

Certified copies of deeds to real property may be obtained from the County Recorder's office in the county where the property is located. To apply, you will need the name of the owner of the deed, property address, and, preferably, the recorded year of the deed and the title of the document (or document number). Unless waived due to the wildfires, copy fees vary from \$1.25 to \$7.00 for the first page, and from \$0.50 to \$3.00 for each page thereafter. A list of the County Recorders' offices in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Solano, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties is provided at the end of this chapter.

### **As a result of the wildfires, my will and/or family trust document was destroyed. What should I do?**

If the will and/or family trust was prepared by an attorney, you may be able to obtain a copy of the document by contacting the attorney who drafted it. If you do not have the attorney's current address, search for the attorney's contact information online at <http://members.calbar.ca.gov/search/member.aspx> or contact the State Bar of California at (415) 538-2000. If

## DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT

the attorney does not have a copy of the document, you should consider whether the document may have been recorded elsewhere, and check with the appropriate County Recorder's office by using the contact information provided below. Otherwise, you should have a new will, trust, and/or other document drafted.

### **As a result of the wildfires, my insurance policy, premium notice, or other insurance-related document was destroyed. What should I do?**

If insurance documents are destroyed, contact your insurance agent or insurance company to obtain a copy of the policy.

#### **County Recorder's Office Contact Information**

##### **Butte County Clerk-Recorder**

<https://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/>

Butte County Hall of Records, 155 Nelson Ave., Oroville, CA 95965  
(530) 538-7691 (toll free within Butte County: (800) 894-7761)

##### **Lake County Assessor-Recorder**

<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm>

Lake County Courthouse, 255 North Forbes St., Lakeport, CA 95453  
(707) 263-2293 (Recorder); (707) 263-2302 (Assessor)

##### **Mendocino County Assessor-Clerk-Recorder**

<https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/assessor-county-clerk-recorder-elections/county-recorder>

501 Low Gap Rd., Room 1020, Ukiah, CA 95482  
(707) 234-6822

##### **Napa County Clerk-Recorder**

<http://www.countyofnapa.org/Recorder-Clerk/>

Carithers Building, 900 Coombs St., Room 116, Napa, CA 94559  
(707) 253-4247 (Clerk); (707) 253-4105 (Recorder)

##### **Nevada County Clerk-Recorder**

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/235/Clerk-Recorder>

950 Maidu Ave., Suite 210, Nevada City, CA 95959  
(530) 265-1221

##### **Solano County Assessor-Recorder**

<http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ar/home.asp>

675 Texas St., Suite 2700, Fairfield, CA 94533  
(707) 784-6210 (Assessor); (707) 784-6290 (Recorder)

##### **Sonoma County Clerk-Recorder**

<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Clerk-Recorder/>

585 Fiscal Dr., Room 103, Santa Rosa, CA 95403  
(707) 565-3800

**DOCUMENT & RECORD REPLACEMENT**

**Yuba County Clerk-Recorder**

<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/clerk/>

<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/recorder/>

915 8th St., Suite 107, Marysville, CA 95901

(530) 749-7851 (Clerk); (530) 749-7850 (Recorder)

## INTERNET & TELEPHONE RESOURCES

### PUBLIC SAFETY NEWS AND INFORMATION

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is providing a free “Ready for Wildfire” application which is now available in both the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store—search for CAL Fire to install. Users can sign up for customized alerts that will send texts or push notifications to their device when CAL FIRE is responding to or assisting with a wildfire in their area. Users can also set up alerts for single counties, multiple counties, or statewide, or can also set up an alert if a wildfire is reported within 30 miles of their device.

In addition to free over-the-air broadcast channels, XM Satellite Radio is broadcasting updates and public safety information, including traffic, weather, and evacuation news regarding the California wildfires on its 24-hour radio channel Emergency Alert (XM channel 247). Anyone who has an XM receiver (even if you are not an XM subscriber) can tune in to this station. So, for example, if you have an XM radio in your car (even if you do not pay to subscribe to XM), you can tune in to these updates.

Emergency operations centers are also sending out information via Nixle (<http://www.nixle.com/>). To get up-to-date information on evacuations, shelters, and road closures, text your zip code to 888777.

Sonoma County residents may also join SoCoAlert: <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/FES/Emergency-Management/SoCoAlert/>. This free service provides local alerts via home, cell, work, email, and/or text. A free app for Apple and android devices is also available.

### TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES

Several telephone companies are offering free call forwarding and other services to customers who have evacuated due to the wildfires.

**Verizon** customers in affected areas are eligible for certain free services. Postpaid mobile phone customers are eligible for talk, text, and data relief while prepaid customers will receive an extra 3 GB for talk, text, and data. A list of eligible zip codes for qualifying areas of relief is available online at <https://www.verizonwireless.com/featured/relief/>. Depending on area, relief is available for service provided from October 10 – October 18, 2017 or October 13 – October 18, 2017. Customers may also contact customer care at (800) 922-0204 for further information.

**AT&T** customers in affected areas are also eligible for several free services. AT&T wireless customers will automatically be issued credits for unlimited data, voice, and text for service provided from October 9 – October 18. AT&T prepaid customers in the same counties will receive credits for the same service time period for unlimited voice and text. This applies to AT&T wireless customers with billing addresses and AT&T prepaid customers with phone numbers in the following counties: Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Solano, Sonoma, and Yuba.

AT&T is also providing consumer landline customers with free wireless connections for a limited time. Landline consumers can visit an AT&T retail location to receive a free AT&T prepaid device, while supplies last, and a \$25 pin that can be used for \$0.25/min calling and \$0.20 texts. This offer applies to customers with an AT&T landline or VoIP service in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Solano, Sonoma, and Yuba Counties, *and* who do not have active cell phone service from AT&T. Further details are available at [http://about.att.com/inside\\_connections\\_blog/california\\_fires](http://about.att.com/inside_connections_blog/california_fires).

Affected video subscribers and home Internet customers can contact AT&T at (800) 288-2020 with questions about their service and/or damaged equipment, or to voluntarily pause their service to suspend charges.

AT&T video customers with an active account and a Wi-Fi or wireless connection can access their DIRECTV or U-verse TV content by downloading the respective mobile app in the Google Play Store for Android Devices or on iTunes for iOS devices.

**U.S. Cellular** customers in affected areas are also eligible for free services. U.S. Cellular is waiving any overage charges for postpaid customers who have billing addresses in the affected counties for services provided from October 9 – October 15, 2017.

**Sprint, Boost Mobile, and Virgin Mobile** customers in affected areas will have text, call, and data overage fees waived for services provided through October 15, 2017.

## INTERNET & TELEPHONE RESOURCES

Further details are available at <http://newsroom.sprint.com/sprint-responds-to-northern-california-wildfires.htm>.

As of October 20, 2017, **T-Mobile** is still providing mobile trucks with water, snacks, and respiratory masks, as well as charging stations and portable chargers throughout the affected areas. Further information is available at <https://newsroom.t-mobile.com/news-and-blogs/t-mobile-responds-to-california-wildfires.htm>.

### INTERNET SERVICES

**Comcast** is opening up Xfinity WiFi hotspots throughout Northern California to help residents and personnel stay connected amid wildfires in the region. Ungated access throughout the Napa and Sonoma County areas is available on access points with the "xfinitywifi" SSID. Comcast Internet subscribers can sign on with their regular credentials and stay connected on various hotspots. Non-subscribers will need to pick the "xfinitywifi" network name from the list of available hotspots, launch a browser, and locate the "Not an XFINITY Internet Customer" section on the sign-in page to get started.

A map of Xfinity WiFi hotspots by zip code is available at <http://wifi.xfinity.com/>.

As of October 20, 2017 **AT&T** teams at the following shelters are providing Wi-Fi, charging solutions, phones for use, account support, live news via DirecTV Now, snacks, and water:

- Napa: Napa Valley College, 2277 Napa-Vallejo Hwy., Napa, CA 94558
- Petaluma: Community Center, 320 N. McDowell Blvd., Petaluma, CA 94954
- Santa Rosa: Elsie Allen High School, 599 Bellevue Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95407
- Santa Rosa: Veterans Memorial Building, 1351 Maple Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95404
- Sonoma: Sonoma County Fairgrounds, 1350 Bennet Valley Rd., Santa Rosa, CA 95404
- Yuba City: Yuba Sutter Fairgrounds, 442 Franklin Ave., Yuba City, CA 95991

As of October 20, 2017 **U.S. Cellular** is also still providing free Wi-Fi, charging, and power packs along with portable chargers at the following U.S. Cellular locations, schools, and library during normal store hours:

- U.S. Cellular, 14896 Olympic Dr., Clearlake, CA 95422
- U.S. Cellular, New Trend Wireless, 365 Lakeport Blvd., Lakeport, CA 95453
- U.S. Cellular, 1232 Airport Park Blvd., Ukiah, CA 95482
- U.S. Cellular, New Trend Wireless, 1393 N. State St., Ukiah, CA 95482
- U.S. Cellular, New Trend Wireless, 1702 S. Main St., Willits, CA 95490
- Ukiah High School, 1000 Low Gap Road, Ukiah, CA 95482 (power packs and chargers only)
- Willits High School, 299 N. Main St., Willits, CA 95490 (power packs and chargers only)
- Willits Library, 390 E. Commercial St., Willits, CA 95490 (power packs and chargers only)

**Verizon** has also deployed a mobile cell site to provide coverage to the Sonoma County Fairgrounds evacuation shelter in Santa Rosa. As of October 20, 2017, there is also a Verizon Disaster Response Trailer at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Napa (3285 Claremont Way, Napa, CA 94558). It has Internet access, laptop computers, phones, and a wireless charging station. As of October 20, 2017, there is also a Verizon mobile access point at Napa Valley College (2277 Napa Valley Hwy., Napa, CA 94558), with free charging stations, laptops with Internet service, phones, and televisions. Internet service is also available at local libraries. Each Napa County library branch has set up space for evacuees to access the Internet. The Internet can be accessed 24 hours a day by connecting to the library system's Wi-Fi from the parking lot. You can find library locations on this website: <http://www.countyofnapa.org/library/hoursandlocations/>.

## CONSUMER TIPS & FRAUD PREVENTION

### Could I become a victim of fraud?

Unfortunately, after a disaster, some people try to take advantage of victims by engaging in financial scams and frauds. In some cases these individuals and companies claim to be offering help by engaging in what may be legal acts but which in reality result in additional financial hardship to those already suffering. In the aftermath of the wildfires, you should therefore take precautions and be on the lookout for financial scams and con artists.

### What should I be doing to prevent fraud or a financial scam?

The old saying applies: *Things that sound too good to be true usually are.* As a general matter, the following tips should be followed when hiring or contracting with anyone: (1) verify that the company or person is licensed with the appropriate regulatory agencies if the industry is subject to state licensing; (2) obtain multiple estimates of the cost of the service to be performed from different sources so you know that you are getting a fair price; (3) obtain estimates in writing; (4) ask for references so you can speak directly with prior customers to determine whether they were satisfied; (5) when individuals show up at your home, ask for identification to verify that they are who they say they are; (6) read and be sure you thoroughly understand all contracts and service agreements before signing; and (7) file complaints with the appropriate regulatory agencies if confronted with potential fraud or abuse.

Additionally, whenever you have telephone calls with any person at a company or agency, keep a log of the calls for your records. You should log the name of the person with whom you spoke, the date and time of the call, and the subject matter of the call.

If you believe that someone is attempting to defraud you, contact the California Department of Consumer Affairs at (800) 952-5210 or file a complaint online at <http://www.dca.ca.gov/consumer/complaints.shtml>.

### What if someone asks me to sign something?

You should look out for anyone who is in a hurry to have you sign a document or contract. A red flag should go up if someone says that you must sign right away to get a low price or a special deal. A person or company that is really trying to aid victims and/or provide legitimate services will not make such demands and will appreciate that you will need to truly understand what you are signing. Most importantly, read everything before you sign it and make sure you understand what you are signing. Do not be afraid to ask questions about the meaning of the contract. Consider getting the assistance of a qualified attorney (if you do not have your own attorney, you may want to refer to the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook). Get copies of anything that you sign, when you sign.

You should also be careful about signing a contract containing language that you are unable to read or understand. Do not sign a contract in a language you cannot personally understand, unless you have a trusted individual who is fluent in that language (such as a friend, adult family member, or attorney) translate the contract for you. If you have already signed a contract in a language you cannot personally understand, you may still have protections available and you may want to consult an attorney. (See the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.) California law requires that an accurate translation of a contract must be given to the consumer by a person in a trade or business who negotiates primarily in the Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, or Korean languages. This protection does not apply if the consumer has an interpreter assist in the negotiation. This protection also does not apply to home improvement contracts or contracts involving a seller who is not engaged in a trade or business. You can read more about these protections at [http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/legal\\_guides/k-4.shtml](http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/legal_guides/k-4.shtml), but if you find yourself in a situation where you have signed a contract you do not understand, you should consult with an attorney.

### What is a public insurance adjuster and what should I look for if I decide to hire one?

A public insurance adjuster is someone who evaluates property loss on behalf of a policyholder and helps them file insurance claims in exchange for a fee. Many public insurance adjusters will claim that they can maximize your insurance benefits by finding damage that an insurance company adjuster may not find. However, you should understand that your insurance company may provide an independent insurance adjuster to you at no charge, unlike a public insurance adjuster, who is paid a fee or a percentage of your claim. If you use the insurance company's adjuster and are not confident in his or her findings, you still have the right to separately hire a public adjuster to help you. However, it is important that you understand what the fees are and how they are calculated before you hire a public adjuster. It is also a good idea to rely on referrals to determine which public adjusters are legitimate. If you decide to hire a public adjuster, make sure that he or she is licensed. Call the California Department of Insurance (CDI) at (800) 967-9331 or access the CDI's website at <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/>. Click on "Consumers" and then "Check Licensing Status" for licensing verification and other information regarding public adjusters.

## CONSUMER TIPS & FRAUD PREVENTION

### What do I need to consider if I am offered a home loan?

Before you get a loan to rebuild your house, you should shop around for different lenders to determine which one is offering you the best interest rates and the lowest fees. Before getting a loan from a private lender, you should always check to see if you qualify for any government assistance programs, such as FEMA, SBA, and HUD programs, or assistance from the State of California. (For further information on these government programs, please see the **Housing** chapter of this handbook.) Be on the lookout for “guaranteed loans” which is when a person contacts you and guarantees you an “offer” of a loan regardless of your credit situation for an upfront fee. Legitimate lenders do not guarantee that you will qualify for a loan before you complete an application and run a credit check. Legitimate lenders may charge a small application fee but they do not promise that you will get the loan until they complete their review. Make sure that you are dealing with a licensed lender. The California Department of Business Oversight licenses most lenders and you should check with them to determine whether the lender is legitimate. They can be reached at (866) 275-2677 or online at <https://docqnet.dbo.ca.gov/licensesearch/>.

### What should I look for when hiring contractors to do repair work on my house?

Problems with home repair contractors, such as abandonment and shoddy work, are common in general and often happen after disasters. Watch out for door-to-door offers of repair services and never provide a contractor with a cash deposit based on a handshake. You should get a written contract that details every aspect of the work to be done and a performance and payment schedule. Before signing a contract with a contractor, consider whether you need to consult with an attorney and be sure to check the contractor’s license status and references. You can check licenses online on the California Contractor State License Board (CSLB) website, at <https://www2.cslb.ca.gov/onlineservices/CheckLicense/checklicense.aspx>. You can also file complaints online at [http://www.cslb.ca.gov/Consumers/Filing\\_A\\_Complaint/](http://www.cslb.ca.gov/Consumers/Filing_A_Complaint/). In addition, the CSLB has established a hotline where disaster victims can obtain more information: (800) 962-1125 (Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.).

The Federal Trade Commission also provides the following article outlining steps for finding and hiring a contractor and spotting scams: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0242-hiring-contractor>.

### Is loan consolidation a good idea?

While the decision whether to consolidate loans or transfer loans to a new finance company depends on your particular situation and the terms being offered, you should be aware that some financial companies may try and take advantage of your situation in the wake of a disaster. Because of the disaster, you may not be able to pay your creditors on time and finance companies may contact you promising to consolidate your home mortgage, credit card debt, car loans, and repair loans. They will claim that such consolidation will lower your monthly payments and give you more time to pay the debt. Such companies often pressure you to sign multiple loan agreements without giving you a chance to review the documents, thoroughly understand the interest rate or repayment terms, or consult with another person or an attorney. In many instances, these refinancings result in high fees and interest rates, payments to bogus creditors, and can leave you in a situation where you default and damage your credit. You should therefore carefully review the terms of any refinancing, verify that the company you are dealing with is legitimate and licensed, and check referrals from previous customers. It is also recommended that you have an attorney review the documents and provide advice.

### Can I do anything about being hassled by a collection agency?

Creditors are not required to let you know that they are referring your account to a collection agency. However, you have certain legal rights that protect you from harassment by a collection agency. For example, debt collectors may only call between 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. (They can, however, contact your employer for certain information, as well as contact you at your work.) Debt collectors cannot use obscene or profane language or make threats to harm you or your property. There is no law that limits the number of calls that an agency can make, but repeated calls over a short period of time are prohibited if they would constitute harassment.

You can obtain more information about your rights with respect to collection agencies by consulting the California Attorney General’s website at <http://oag.ca.gov>. Click on the “Consumer Information” link, then “Consumer Topics,” and then “Debt Collectors.” You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. You can contact the Commission by mail at Consumer Response Center, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20580-0001; by telephone at (877) FTC-HELP/(877) 382-4357 (TTY: (866) 653-4261); or via its website at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).

### What if I am the victim of identity theft?

Identity thieves steal personal information and use it to obtain credit cards, loans, or bank accounts in other peoples’ names. When the bills are not paid, the victims may or may not be held responsible for some or all of the charges.

## CONSUMER TIPS & FRAUD PREVENTION

Identity theft can happen anywhere, including following a disaster due in part to people evacuating in a hurry or exercising less care in giving out information. In trying to reestablish their lives, those affected by disasters can make their personal information vulnerable, especially when it gets communicated over the Internet. Identity thieves may also pose as authority figures to try to steal personal information, and they may even impersonate disaster victims to try to obtain checks or other emergency services. FEMA has reported that in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, which recently hit Texas, scam artists have posed as FEMA inspectors asking for personal information or trying to charge for services such as damage inspections or contractor repairs.

You should never give your complete Social Security number, bank account number, or credit card information to anyone unless you are certain that the person is actually a representative of a legitimate organization. If you have any doubt, check with the organization and do not rely on the person's word. Federal and state workers do not ask for, or accept, money. FEMA staff do not charge applicants for disaster assistance, home inspections, or help filling out applications. All FEMA representatives carry a laminated photo ID.

In general, if you believe that you are a victim of identity theft, you should: (1) contact the fraud department of the three major credit bureaus to request a free (and renewable) 90-day fraud alert—you can call Experian at (888) 397-3742, Equifax at (800) 685-1111, and TransUnion at (888) 909-8872; (2) contact your local police and report the identity theft—be sure to obtain a copy of the police report and forms to use to request account information from creditors; (3) fill out an identity-theft report at [www.identitytheft.gov](http://www.identitytheft.gov); and (4) contact your creditors and request information about the fraudulent accounts—ask for accounts that have been used fraudulently to be closed and reported to the credit bureaus as “closed at consumer’s request.” You can use the police report and identity theft report to help prove that you were the victim of identity theft. For more information, visit the California Attorney General’s website at [www.oag.ca.gov/idtheft](http://www.oag.ca.gov/idtheft) and FEMA’s website at <https://www.fema.gov/>.

In the wake of the recent wildfires, some individuals have applied for FEMA help using identities that are not their own. If you learn someone has used your identity to apply for FEMA assistance, a FEMA representative can help you file a new application and will provide information for you to file a complaint. (If you decide not to file an application, the representative will confirm you do not want to access FEMA benefits.) You should also contact DHS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) at (800) 323-8603 (TTY 844-889-4357). You can file a complaint online at <http://www.oig.dhs.gov/>, fax a complaint to (202) 254-4297, or mail a complaint to DHS Office of Inspector General: Mail Stop 0305, Dept. of Homeland Security, 245 Murray Dr. SW, Washington D.C. 20528-0305. In addition, those with information related to this type of fraud can call FEMA’s Office of the Chief Security Officer (OCSC) tip line at (866) 223-0814 or email [FEMA-OCSC-Tipline@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-OCSC-Tipline@fema.dhs.gov). If you suspect suspicious activity or fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at (866) 720-5721, fax (225) 334-4707, or email [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov).

### **What should I look for when hiring a moving company?**

When hiring a moving company that you are unfamiliar with, you should: (1) ask for references; (2) make sure the mover is licensed, insured, and in good standing with the California Public Utilities Commission; (3) get an estimate in writing of the cost of the move and how long it will take (a written cost estimate is binding, but oral or Internet estimates are not); (4) know that the moving company must provide a “not to exceed” price for all household moves in an agreement for moving services; and (5) make sure you understand the moving company’s insurance limits and consider whether you should purchase additional insurance.

More information, including an updated list of licensed movers, information about maximum rates, information about how to file a claim for loss or damages, and several consumer-protection resources, is available online at <http://consumers.cpuc.ca.gov/Movercic/> or you can call (800) 894-9444 to check if a mover is on the list. Also, you can file a complaint against a moving company online at <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/movercomplaint/> or by calling (800) 366-4782. Loss or damages claims must be filed in writing within nine months after your goods have been delivered.

### **What should I look for when hiring a storage company?**

Before you turn your belongings over to anyone for storage you should make sure that: (1) the storage company is legitimate and reputable by talking with people who have used their services; (2) you have a written agreement with the storage company that lists what will be provided, the cost to you, and, specifically, the property you are turning over for storage; and (3) you have considered whether and how to insure the contents of your storage unit (your homeowners or renters insurance may or may not already cover some of the items).



## CONSUMER TIPS & FRAUD PREVENTION

### What should I look for when hiring an attorney?

It is important to always start with a referral from a trusted source. If you do not have a trusted friend or family member who can refer you to an attorney, you can inquire with a local lawyer referral service that has been certified by the State Bar of California. (We have listed such certified services for the affected counties in the **Lawyer Referral Services & Legal Aid** chapter of this handbook.) To obtain a listing of State Bar-certified referral services in other counties, you can call the State Bar lawyer referral services at (866) 442-2529 (in California) or (415) 538-2250 (outside California) or look them up on the Internet at [www.calbar.ca.gov/lrs](http://www.calbar.ca.gov/lrs).) Additionally, you may want to review the State Bar's consumer Legal Guides, "Finding the Right Lawyer" and "Problem with a Lawyer," which are located online at [www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov). Click the "Public" link, then the "Free Legal Information" link, and then the "Legal Guides" link.

If you need to file a complaint against an attorney, you should contact the State Bar of California at (800) 843-9053 or visit their website at [www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov) and click on the "How to file an attorney misconduct complaint" link.

### After a disaster can a seller of products radically increase their prices to make a quick buck?

After the government declares a state of emergency, it is illegal for businesses to increase the cost of certain goods by more than 10%, unless they can prove that the increase was based on an increase in their supplier's price or directly attributable to additional costs for labor or materials to provide the services. The prohibition on price gouging applies to food, emergency and medical supplies, gasoline, repairs, housing, transportation, and reconstruction. The prohibition extends for 30 days after a declaration of emergency, although for reconstruction services and emergency cleanup services, the ban is extended for 180 days.

At the time of this writing, the president and governor have declared a state of emergency in California as a result of the wildfires. These declarations have activated the prohibition against price gouging.

If you suspect price gouging, contact your local district attorney or the California Attorney General's Office at (800) 952-5225. You can also refer to the FAQs about price gouging during disasters on the California Attorney General's website at <https://oag.ca.gov/consumers>.

## LOSS OF LIFE

### PROPERTY TRANSFERS; WILLS AND PROBATE

The rules regarding property transfers at death vary among the states. In general, the relevant rules will be those of the state in which the person who died (referred to as a “decedent”) usually resided at the time of his or her death, even if he or she died in another state. However, in some cases, the rules of other states in which the decedent owned assets may also be relevant. This section provides a general description based on California law, but there may be some variations in the rules involving states outside California. In addition, special rules not discussed below may apply in certain circumstances such as where spouses pass away at nearly the same time or where a missing person is presumed deceased. Accordingly, it may be advisable to consult with a qualified attorney or seek assistance from a legal aid organization.

#### **Who will get ownership of my deceased loved one’s assets?**

Certain types of assets will pass automatically by contract or law regardless of the existence of or contents of a will. For instance, jointly owned (joint tenancy) assets pass on the death of one of the owners to the surviving joint owner(s). Certain other assets (such as life insurance proceeds and retirement plan benefits) pass by their terms to designated beneficiaries. Assets held in a revocable trust are disposed of in accordance with the trust instrument following the death of the person who established the trust.

The assets described above are usually not part of a decedent’s estate and are not subject to probate court proceedings unless the decedent’s estate itself has been designated as a beneficiary. Other assets owned by a decedent at the time of his or her death will make up that person’s “estate” and will pass to that person’s successors.

Generally, succession will depend on whether the decedent left a will or not. A person who died without a will is said to have died “intestate.”

If someone died with a valid will, his or her estate will be distributed according to the will, subject to any overriding state laws, such as community property (California is a community property state) and forced heirship statutes. If a person died intestate (without having a will), his or her estate will be distributed according to the intestacy laws of the state in which the decedent resided or possibly the state in which the assets are situated if the assets are located in a state other than the state of residence of the decedent.

Generally, an intestate decedent’s spouse, children, parents, and/or siblings will receive the assets as a matter of the applicable laws. However, each state has different separate and distinct rules governing intestate succession that could affect how property gets passed to the decedent’s family members.

#### **My loved one left behind a will. What do I need to do?**

A will usually names an executor. If not, an executor who is responsible for administering estates will be appointed by the court, referred to as the “probate” court. The executor’s job is to collect the decedent’s assets, pay the decedent’s debts (such as taxes, bills, loans, and expenses of administering the estate), and distribute any remaining assets according to the provisions of the will and relevant state statutes.

In order to carry out his, her, or its duties, the executor must generally file a petition for probate with the appropriate state court, along with the original will and death certificate, and obtain letters testamentary (documents issued by a court or public official to authorize the executor to take control of the estate). The petition for probate must contain pertinent information about the decedent and his or her family, debts, and assets. Usually, this filing must be done in the court in the county in which the decedent resided (even if he or she died in a different county), and it should be filed promptly (generally within 30 days) after the executor becomes aware of the death. A copy of the petition for probate for California courts is available here: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/de111.pdf>. Because a petition for probate is a proceeding involving the court system, the executor should generally engage a lawyer or contact a legal aid organization to assist with the filing of the petition and the administration of the decedent’s estate.

In California, aside from an executor, any person who was given custody of the decedent’s original will while the decedent was living is technically required, within 30 days of becoming aware of the decedent’s death, to deliver the will to the court of the county in which the decedent resided and mail a copy of the will to the named executor, unless a petition for probate has already been filed as described above. Other states may impose a similar requirement.

## LOSS OF LIFE

Once the letters testamentary have been granted by the court, the executor has the authority to and may begin to pay the decedent's debts and distribute the remaining assets to the beneficiaries of the decedent's estate.

For self-help resources regarding probate court in California, including "Steps to Take if the Case Belongs in Probate Court," visit the California Judicial Branch website: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/8865.htm>.

In addition, see the Superior Court of California websites for each county affected by wildfires for information on where to file a petition for probate in that county:

- Butte County: <http://www.buttecourt.ca.gov/default.cfm>
- Lake County: <http://www.lake.courts.ca.gov/>
- Mendocino County: <http://www.mendocino.courts.ca.gov/divisions/probate/probate.asp>
- Napa County: <http://www.napa.courts.ca.gov/divisions/civil>
- Nevada County: <http://nccourt.net/divisions/probate.shtml>
- Orange County: <http://www.occourts.org/self-help/probate/>
- Solano County: <http://www.solano.courts.ca.gov/Courts/ProbateConservatorshipGuardianship.html>
- Sonoma County: <http://sonoma.courts.ca.gov/divisions/probate>
- Yuba County: <http://www.yubacourts.org/divisions/probate>

### **What if I know that my loved one left a will, but I cannot find it?**

There are several places to check for a decedent's will. First, if you know the lawyer who prepared the will, you can check to find out if he or she has retained the original, or at least a copy. You can also check with the local probate court, just in case the will was filed with the local court. Another place to check is the County Recorder's office because some people record their wills in the public record. A list of County Recorders' offices can be found in the **Document & Record Replacement** chapter of this handbook.

In certain cases, a copy of a will can still be probated if the original cannot be found. If the will is lost, you may be able to prove the contents of the will in probate court, depending on the requirements of state law regarding lost wills.

### **My loved one did not leave a will or none can be found. What do I need to do?**

If there is no will or no will can be found, an administrator of the decedent's estate will need to be appointed by the court to pay the deceased's debts and distribute the remaining assets of the estate to the beneficiaries based on the rules of intestate succession. The appointed administrator will generally be selected in the following order (assuming the potential administrator is competent and is at least 18 years old):

- the decedent's spouse;
- one or more of the decedent's children;
- one or more of the decedent's grandchildren;
- either or both of the decedent's parents;
- one or more of the decedent's brothers and sisters;
- any other distributee (heir); or
- one or more creditors of the estate.

The proposed administrator must file a petition for letters of administration in the appropriate state court along with a death certificate. Similar to the petition for probate, this petition lists pertinent information about the decedent and his or her family and assets.

Once the letters of administration have been granted by the court, the administrator of the estate has the authority to and may begin to pay the decedent's debts and make the proper distributions to the beneficiaries of the estate in accordance with the laws of intestacy.

## **GUARDIANSHIPS OF MINORS AND INCOMPETENT ADULTS**

### **I know a child who lost his or her only parent or both parents in the disaster. The parent provided for me to become the caretaker of the child in a will. What steps do I need to take to become the child's legal guardian?**

A guardian is a non-parent to whom the court gives authority to take responsibility for the care of a child. If the parent specified you to be the child's guardian in a will, you must complete guardianship proceedings in the appropriate

## LOSS OF LIFE

California county. See the Guardianship Pamphlet for the Guardianships of Children in the Probate Court, provided by the Judicial Branch of California for more information: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/gc205.pdf>. The petition for appointment of guardian is available here: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/gc210p.pdf> and here: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/gc210.pdf>. The proper venue for beginning a guardianship proceeding is either the county in which the child lives or such county as may be in the best interests of the child. The parent's will must also be duly admitted to probate.

### **The deceased parent did not specify another person to care for his or her child. What do I do if I wish to become the child's legal guardian?**

You can petition the court to be appointed as the guardian of a child and/or the child's property if you have the ability and want to take responsibility for that child. An appointment of guardianship may be permanent or temporary, and it generally expires when the child reaches the age of 18.

To file a petition for guardianship, you can go to the appropriate state court in the county where the child resides or such county as may be in the best interests of the child and ask the court clerk for the necessary legal forms (see the list of county courts above). If the court appoints you as guardian, you will receive letters of guardianship. You will need these documents for matters such as enrolling the child in school or for hospital emergencies. Please note that letters of guardianship are only valid in the state where they are issued.

Since it involves a court assignment of responsibilities, it is advisable to consult with an attorney or legal aid organization before proceeding to petition for guardianship. Other potential alternatives to guardianship, not covered here, are adoptions and custody arrangements.

### **What if a child inherits a sum of money or receives funds from an organization?**

Funds received by a child through inheritance or award will be administered by a guardian of the child's property. The child's assets or income must be invested as directed by the court for the child's benefit. The court may require the guardian to post a bond to ensure compliance with rules of the court and laws regarding the investment of a child's assets. If there are assets, the best scenario may be for the guardian of the child to be appointed the guardian of the assets. Usually, the funds are turned over to the child on the child's 18th birthday, at which time the guardianship is typically ended. For more information, see the Judicial Branch of California's resource page on guardianship, which is available at <http://www.courts.ca.gov/1212.htm>.

### **What if I am responsible for the care of a child who has received funds and I need to spend money on the child's behalf?**

With the permission of the court, as guardian of the child's property you may pay certain expenses on behalf of the child using funds held by you on the child's behalf. The court will decide each request based on the best interests of the child. You must petition the court for approval of each expense in advance or, if the court deems it to be appropriate, you may be able to obtain a monthly stipend for regular expenses. While courts approve spending on a case-by-case basis, expenses that are typically approved include education, medical, and other support costs.

### **Do guardianships apply for adults as well? What if I now have to take care of an adult who is incompetent?**

A similar protective proceeding may also be instituted for an adult who is incompetent or has become unable to take care of his or her personal needs or property. This is called a conservatorship. You can file a petition to become a conservator of an adult and his or her property in the court in the county where the incompetent adult resides. Again, because this involves a court assignment of responsibilities, it is advisable for you to consult with an attorney or legal aid organization before proceeding.

## TAXES FOR MISSING OR DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS

### **Should federal income tax returns be filed on behalf of my missing relatives?**

If your missing relative has not been officially declared deceased, you should consult a professional tax advisor about filing his or her returns. If a death certificate has not been issued, regular tax returns may be required to be filed on the missing person's behalf.

### **Should federal and California income tax returns be filed on behalf of my deceased relatives? If so, when?**

A final return (IRS Form 1040 and/or FTB Form 540) should be filed for the year of death and for any prior years for which required returns have not yet been filed. If not filing a joint return, a final federal and California income tax return should

## LOSS OF LIFE

be filed by the “executor” or the “personal representative” or another administrator of the estate of the decedent, appointed by the court. The word “**DECEASED**,” the name of the deceased, and the date of death should be written across the top of the return. If it is a joint return, the name and address of the decedent and the surviving spouse should be written in the name and address space. If it is not a joint return, the name of the decedent should be written in the name space and the name and address of the estate administrator or another person filing the return should be written in the remaining space. Generally, the final income tax return for a decedent who was a calendar-year taxpayer is due on April 15 following the year of his or her death. Thus, in this case, the final return would ordinarily be due on April 15, 2018. Income tax returns may also be required on behalf of the estate of the decedent. It is advisable to consult with an accountant, tax lawyer, or other tax advisor with respect to the information above.

### **Can I file a joint tax return with my missing or deceased spouse?**

Yes, unless you remarry before the end of the year of his or her death. If filing a joint return with your missing or deceased spouse, you should indicate at the top of the return that you are doing so. Consult with an accountant, tax lawyer, or other tax advisor for additional information.

### **Should a federal or California estate tax return be filed? If so, when and by whom?**

Most relatively simple estates (e.g., consisting of cash, publicly traded securities, small amounts of other easily valued assets, and no special deductions or elections or jointly held property) with a total value under \$5,490,00 and a date of death in 2017 do not require the filing of a federal estate tax return. (For this purpose, the value of lifetime taxable gifts made by a decedent during or after 1977 is treated as part of the estate.)

However, the determination whether a federal estate tax return must be filed can be very complicated and you should consult a professional tax advisor regarding the need to file a federal estate tax return. If a federal estate tax return must be filed, in general, the return (Form 706) must be filed within nine months after the date of decedent’s death. Extensions for filing can be applied for, although any taxes due should be paid on time to avoid interest and penalty charges. Federal estate tax returns should generally be filed by the person administering the decedent’s estate.

(There is no requirement to file a California estate tax return for deceased individuals with a date of death in 2017.)

### **Are life insurance proceeds taxable?**

Generally, life insurance proceeds are not subject to California or federal income tax. However, they may be subject to estate tax in certain instances. The taxation of life insurance proceeds is complex, and consulting a professional tax advisor regarding this matter is encouraged.

## PETS & ANIMALS

I had to leave my pets when I was evacuated. Are there resources to help me find them?

The following are lost animal hotlines:

### National Hotlines

(888) PETS-911  
(800) HUMANE-1

### Calistoga Police Department

(707) 942-2810

### Lake County Animal Care & Control

(707) 263-0278

### Marin Humane Society

(415) 883-4621

### Napa County Animal Shelter

(707) 253-4382

### Napa County Animal Services

(707) 253-4509

### Napa County Sheriff's Department Yountville substation

(707) 944-9228

### Sonoma County Animal Services

(707) 565-7100

### Sonoma Humane Society

(707) 542-0882

### St. Helena Police Department

(707) 967-2850

Owners can also check the following websites to help locate a lost pet:

### Napa Humane

<https://napahumane.org/lost-and-found/what-to-do-if-you-have-lost-a-pet/>

### Napa County Animal Shelter – Lost and Found Animals

<http://services.countyofnapa.org/PetAdoption/Found.aspx>

### Napa County Animal Services

<http://www.countyofnapa.org/Sheriff/AnimalControl/>

### Pet Harbor

<http://www.petharbor.com>

### Pets Lifeline

<http://www.petslifeline.org/lost--found>

### Solano County

[https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/psd/animal\\_control/lost\\_pets/default.asp](https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/psd/animal_control/lost_pets/default.asp)

### Sonoma County – Lost and Found Animals

<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Animal-Services/Lost-and-Found/>

### Sonoma Humane Society

<http://sonomahumane.org/owner-support/lost-or-found-a-pet/>

<http://sonomahumane.org/fire/>

### The Humane Society of the United States

<http://www.hsus.org>

### Wine Country Animal Lovers

<http://www.winecountryanimallovers.org/about/>

### Facebook

- Missing Pets of the Napa Valley – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1528329097403205/>
- Napa/Santa Rosa Fires: Lost Animals – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1487787007975978/>
- Napa/Santa Rosa Fires Animal Evacuations – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NapaSantaRosaFireAnimalEvacuations/>

### Twitter

@CALFIRE\_PIO

@napacountyfire

Popular hashtags for Northern California wildfires: #CAfires, #CaliforniaWildfires, #NapaFires, #northbayfires, #TubbsFire, #AtlasFire, #RedwoodComplex, #RedwoodFire, #NunsFire, #PatrickFire

**Our house was destroyed by the wildfires, including the barns and stables we used to shelter our larger animals. Although we were able to evacuate the animals, we now must find some place to keep them. Can anyone help?**

Many shelters in the affected areas are continuing to care for animals displaced by the wildfires, sometimes at no charge. Most Red Cross evacuation centers are accepting household pets in carriers or crates. If possible, pet guardians are urged to bring their own supplies such as food and leashes. For a list of animal shelters in your area, visit the following websites: <https://www.petfinder.com/animal-shelters-and-rescues/> or <http://www.rescuers.com/shelters.htm>.

## PETS & ANIMALS

Additional shelter information is below. If you are planning to seek shelter at one of these sites, please verify that it is open and accepting animals.

<b>Marin County</b>	
<p><b>Marin Humane Society</b>            171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd.            Novato, CA 94949            (415) 250-7009; (415) 883-4621  <a href="https://www.marinhumane.org/get-help/north-bay-fires/">https://www.marinhumane.org/get-help/north-bay-fires/</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts all domestic animals</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Marin Veterans' Memorial Auditorium</b>            10 Ave. of the Flags            San Rafael, CA 94903            (415) 473-6800</p>
<b>Mendocino County</b>	
<p><b>Redwood Empire Fair (Ukiah Fairgrounds)</b>            1055 N. State St.            Ukiah, CA 95482            (707) 462-3884</p>	
<b>Napa County</b>	
<p><b>Napa County Animal Shelter</b>            942 Hartle Ct.            Napa, CA 94558            (707) 253-4382  <a href="http://www.countyofnapa.org/AnimalShelter/">http://www.countyofnapa.org/AnimalShelter/</a>            (Check section entitled "Other Area Shelters")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts dogs, cats, rabbits and other household animals</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Napa County Fairgrounds</b>            1435 N. Oak St.            Calistoga, CA 94515            (707) 942-5111</p>
<p><b>Vintage Farm (Vintage High School)</b>            1185 Sierra Ave.            Napa, CA 94558            (707) 253-3601</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Only accepting farm animals</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Solano County</b>	
<p><b>Solano Community College</b>            4000 Suisun Valley Rd.            Fairfield, CA 94534            (707) 864-7000</p>	

## PETS & ANIMALS

<b>Sonoma County</b>	
<p><b>Cloverdale Citrus Fair</b> 1 Citrus Fair Dr. Cloverdale, CA 95425 (707) 894-3992</p>	<p><b>Cloverdale Sonoma Valley High School FFA</b> 20000 Broadway Sonoma, CA 95476 (707) 933-4010</p>
<p><b>Pets Lifeline Animal Shelter</b> 19686 8th St. East Sonoma, CA 95476 (707) 996-4577 <a href="http://www.petslifeline.org/">http://www.petslifeline.org/</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts small pets</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Sonoma County Animal Services</b> 1247 Century Ct. Santa Rosa, CA 95403 (707) 565-7100 (707) 565-4648 (after hours or if other number is busy) <a href="http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/health/animal-services/">http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/health/animal-services/</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts domestic/small animals (mainly dogs, cats, rabbits)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Sonoma County Fairgrounds Shelter</b> 1350 Bennett Valley Rd. Santa Rosa, CA 95404 (707) 545-4200 <a href="http://www.sonomacountyfair.com/animal-evacuation.php">http://www.sonomacountyfair.com/animal-evacuation.php</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts large and small animals</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds</b> 175 Fairgrounds Dr. Petaluma, CA 94952 (707) 283-3247</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accepts large pets</i></li> </ul>

Sonoma and Napa county evacuees in need of boarding for their horses can try to contact:

<p><b>Novato Horsemen</b> 600 Bugeia Ln. Novato, CA 94945 (415) 246-9423</p>	<p><b>Morning Star Farm</b> 885 Sutro Ave. Novato, CA 94947 (415) 897-1633</p>
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### Other locations to check:

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analy High School Gym<br/>6950 Analy Ave.<br/>Sebastopol, CA 95472<br/>(707) 824-2300</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Santa Rosa, CA 95401<br/>(707) 543-3737</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petaluma Community Center<br/>320 N. McDowell Blvd.<br/>Petaluma, CA 94954<br/>(707) 778-4380</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casa Grande High School<br/>333 Casa Grande Rd.<br/>Petaluma, CA 94954,<br/>(707) 778-4677</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healdsburg Community Center<br/>1557 Healdsburg Ave.<br/>Healdsburg, CA 95548<br/>(707) 431-3303</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Santa Rosa Veterans Building<br/>1351 Maple Ave.<br/>Santa Rosa, CA 95404<br/>(844) 301-8227</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of Christ<br/>370 Sonoma Mountain Pkwy.<br/>Petaluma, CA 94954<br/>(707) 778-0842</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lawrence Cook Middle School<br/>2480 Sebastopol Rd.<br/>Santa Rosa, CA 95407<br/>(707) 528-5156</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sebastopol Community Center<br/>390 Morris St.<br/>Sebastopol, CA 95472<br/>(707) 823-1511</li> </ul>    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elsie Allen High School<br/>599 Bellevue Ave.<br/>Santa Rosa, CA 95407<br/>(707) 598-5020</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monte Rio Elementary School<br/>20700 Foothill Dr.<br/>Monte Rio, CA 95462<br/>(707) 865-2266</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VFW Post No. 1929<br/>1094 Petaluma Blvd S.<br/>Petaluma, CA 94952<br/>(707) 762-5698</li> </ul>         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finley Community Center<br/>2060 West College Ave.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Life Christian Fellowship<br/>1310 Clegg St.<br/>Petaluma, CA 94954<br/>(707) 765-0956</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Windsor High School<br/>8695 Windsor Rd.</li> </ul>  |



## PETS & ANIMALS

Windsor, CA 95492

(707) 837-7767

### Other shelters to contact:

- Alameda Animal Shelter  
1590 Fortmann Way  
Alameda, CA 94501  
(510) 337-8565
- Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society  
2700 9th St.  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
(510) 845-7735
- Lake County Animal Control & Shelter  
4949 Helbush Dr.  
Lakeport, CA 95453  
(707) 263-0278
- Benicia-Vallejo Humane Society  
1121 Sonoma Blvd.  
Vallejo, CA 94590  
(707) 645-7905
- East Bay SPCA  
4651 Gleason Dr.  
Dublin, CA 94710  
(925) 479-9670 (emergency boarding number)
- Solano County Animal Control & Shelter  
2510 Clay Bark Rd.  
Fairfield, CA 94533  
(707) 421-7487
- Berkeley Animal Services Shelter  
1 Bolivar Dr.  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
(510) 981-6600
- SPCA of Solano County  
2200 Peabody Rd.  
Vacaville, CA 95681  
(707) 448-7722

### I need a house, apartment, or hotel that allows pets. How can I find one?

Individuals seeking pet-friendly lodging can visit:

[www.bringfido.com](http://www.bringfido.com)

[www.dogfriendly.com](http://www.dogfriendly.com)

[www.doginmysuitcase.com](http://www.doginmysuitcase.com)

[www.gopetfriendly.com](http://www.gopetfriendly.com)

[www.petswelcome.com](http://www.petswelcome.com)

[www.tripswithpets.com](http://www.tripswithpets.com)

### My pet was injured in the wildfires. Can I obtain financial assistance to care for my pet?

Animals that have been injured, orphaned, or otherwise affected by the wildfires may be eligible to receive aid through RedRover (P.O. Box 188890, Sacramento, CA 95818; (916) 429-2457; [info@redrover.org](mailto:info@redrover.org)). RedRover can provide financial assistance grants for emergency veterinary care. Visit their website online at <https://redrover.org/relief/>.

## LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICES & LEGAL AID

### Who can help me understand all these legal issues?

It is strongly advisable to consult with a qualified attorney about a number of the issues you may face as the result of the wildfires, including, but not limited to, obtaining benefits from your insurance policies. If you already have a personal, family, or business attorney, you may want to reach out to him or her for advice and/or a referral.

For those without a prior relationship with an attorney, Northern California has a number of legal referral services and legal services organizations. The referral services listed below have been certified by the State Bar of California. Check out the State Bar's lawyer referral web page, <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Need-Legal-Help/Lawyer-Referral-Service>, to get a complete listing of certified lawyer referral services in all California counties, or call (866) 442-2529 (toll free in California) or (415) 538-2250 (from outside California). The State Bar of California also publishes a consumer pamphlet, "How Can I Find and Hire the Right Lawyer?" which can be obtained online at [http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/publications/Find-Lawyer\\_English.pdf?ver=2017-05-19-134005-260](http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/publications/Find-Lawyer_English.pdf?ver=2017-05-19-134005-260) or by calling (888) 875-5297 or (415) 538-2280.

The legal services organizations listed below work in the affected areas and primarily serve low-income individuals. A full list of California's legal aid and self-help resources can be found at <http://www.lawhelpca.org/>.

### Help Line Numbers and Regional Referrals

#### **Bay Area Legal Aid Health Consumer Center**

(855) 693-7285 (Serving residents of Napa and Sonoma Counties, including displaced residents)  
Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

#### **California Rural Legal Assistance**

1260 N. Dutton Ave, Suite 105  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401  
(707) 528-9941  
<http://crla.org/>

#### **Bay Area Legal Aid Help Line for Victims of Fire**

(800) 551-5554 (Serving residents of Napa and Sonoma Counties)  
Mondays and Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

#### **Disability Rights California**

1831 K St.  
Sacramento, CA 95811  
(800) 776-5746  
<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/>

#### **Help Line for Victims of Fire**

(415) 575-3120 (Serving residents of all affected counties; organized through a collaboration of legal services organizations, the State Bar of California, and other organizations)  
Monday – Thursday, 8:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
<https://www.acbanet.org/volunteer-legal-services/bay-area-resilience-collaborative/>

#### **International Institute of the Bay Area**

17790 Greger St.  
Sonoma, CA 95476  
(707) 939-8864  
<http://www.iibayarea.org/>  
(immigration legal services by appointment only)

#### **California Indian Legal Services**

117 J St., Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(800) 829-0284  
<http://www.calindian.org/>

The website LawHelpCA.org, also has information about legal help related to "Disaster Assistance and Recovery," which can be viewed at <http://www.lawhelpca.org/subtopics/disaster-assistance-and-recovery?page=0>.

<b>Butte County</b>	
Attorney Search Network Butte Lawyer Referral (800) 215-1190	Butte County Self-Help Assistance and Referral Program (SHARP) 1 Court St. Oroville, CA 95965 (530) 532-7015

**LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICES & LEGAL AID**

<b>Butte County</b>	
<p>Legal Services of Northern California Butte Regional Office 541 Normal Ave. (street address) P.O. Box 3728 (mailing address) Chico, CA 95928 (530) 345-9491 (800) 345-9491 (toll free) <a href="http://lsnc.net/office/chico">http://lsnc.net/office/chico</a></p>	<p>Self Help and Referral Program (SHARP) – Chico Office 1775 Concord Ave. Chico, CA 95928 (530) 532-7024 <a href="http://www.lawhelpca.org/org/self-help-and-referral-program-sharp-chico-office">http://www.lawhelpca.org/org/self-help-and-referral-program-sharp-chico-office</a></p>
<b>Lake County</b>	
<p>Legal Services of Northern California 421 North Oak Street Ukiah, CA 95482 (707) 462-1471 (877) 529-7700 (toll free) <a href="https://lsnc.net/office/ukiah">https://lsnc.net/office/ukiah</a></p>	<p>Lake County Court Self-Help Center 7000-A South Center Drive Clearlake, CA 95422 (707) 994-6598, Option #3 <a href="http://www.lake.courts.ca.gov/sh/index.htm">http://www.lake.courts.ca.gov/sh/index.htm</a></p> <p>Mondays and Tuesdays, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (closed from 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.) Wednesdays, 8:30 a.m. – noon Walk-ins only on Mondays from 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.</p>
<b>Mendocino County</b>	
<p>Mendocino County Self-Help Legal Access Center and Family Law Facilitator 100 North State St., Room 304 Ukiah, CA 95482 (707) 468-2020 <a href="http://www.mendocino.courts.ca.gov/self_help/self-help.asp">http://www.mendocino.courts.ca.gov/self_help/self-help.asp</a></p> <p>Monday – Thursday: 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (closed from 1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.)</p>	<p>Legal Services of Northern California – Ukiah Regional Office 421 North Oak St. Ukiah, CA 95482 (707) 462-1471 (877) 529-7700 (toll free) <a href="https://lsnc.net/office/ukiah">https://lsnc.net/office/ukiah</a></p>
<b>Napa County</b>	
<p>Bay Area Legal Aid – Napa Regional Office 575 Lincoln Ave. Suite 210 Napa, CA 94558 (707) 320-6348 (800) 551-5554 (toll free) <a href="https://baylegal.org/get-help/find-an-office/napa-county/">https://baylegal.org/get-help/find-an-office/napa-county/</a></p> <p>Mondays and Thursdays, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Napa County Superior Court Self-Help 825 Brown St. Second Floor Napa, CA 94559 (707) 299-1137 <a href="http://www.napacourt.com/self-help/">http://www.napacourt.com/self-help/</a></p> <p>Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.</p>
<p>Bankruptcy Pro Se/Pro Bono Services (510) 302-2222 option 4 <a href="http://www.canb.uscourts.gov/pro-se-pro-bono-services/">http://www.canb.uscourts.gov/pro-se-pro-bono-services/</a></p>	<p>International Institute of the Bay Area 1820 Jefferson St. Napa, CA 94559 (707) 266-1568, ext. 401 <a href="http://www.iibayarea.org/contact-us/napa-office/">http://www.iibayarea.org/contact-us/napa-office/</a></p>

**LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICES & LEGAL AID**

<b>Nevada County</b>	
<p>Legal Services of Northern California 190 Reamer St. Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-7560 (800) 660-6107 (toll free) <a href="http://lsnc.net/office/auburn">http://lsnc.net/office/auburn</a></p>	<p>Nevada County Lawyer Referral Service 120 North Auburn St., #214 Grass Valley, CA 95945 (530) 888-1836</p>
<b>Solano County</b>	
<p>Legal Services of Northern California 1810 Capitol St. Vallejo, CA 94590 (707) 643-0054 <a href="https://lsnc.net/office/vallejo">https://lsnc.net/office/vallejo</a></p>	<p>Solano County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service Fairfield, CA 94533 (707) 422-0127 <a href="http://www.solanobar.org/lawyer-referral-service/">http://www.solanobar.org/lawyer-referral-service/</a></p> <p align="center">Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – noon</p>
<p>Solano County Library “Lawyers @ Your Library” Program Fairfield Civic Center Library 1150 Kentucky St. Fairfield, CA 94533 <a href="http://www.solanolibrary.com/legal-assistance">http://www.solanolibrary.com/legal-assistance</a></p> <p>Call (866) 572-7587 for details 4th Tuesday of each month, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.</p> <p>Register in person or by calling (866) 572-7587 after 10:00 a.m. on the day of the program.</p>	<p>Solano County Library “Lawyers @ Your Library” Program John F. Kennedy Library 505 Santa Clara St. Vallejo, CA 94590 <a href="http://www.solanolibrary.com/legal-assistance">http://www.solanolibrary.com/legal-assistance</a></p> <p>Call (866) 572-7587 for details 1st &amp; 3rd Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.</p> <p>Register in person or by calling (866) 572-7587 after 10:00 a.m. on the day of the program.</p>
<b>Sonoma County</b>	
<p>Sonoma County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service (707) 546-5297, Ext. 12 <a href="http://www.sonomacountybar.org/?page_id=145">http://www.sonomacountybar.org/?page_id=145</a></p>	<p>Legal Aid of Sonoma County 144 South E St., Suite 100 Santa Rosa, CA 95404 (707) 542-1290 <a href="http://legalaidsc.org/programs/l srp/">http://legalaidsc.org/programs/l srp/</a></p>
<b>Yuba County</b>	
<p>Legal Services of Northern California 619 North St. Woodland, CA 95695 (530) 662-1065 (530) 207-4250 (Senior Link Line) <a href="http://lsnc.net/office/woodland">http://lsnc.net/office/woodland</a></p>	<p>California Rural Legal Assistance 511 “D” St. P.O. Box 2600 Marysville, CA 95901 (530) 742-5191 <a href="http://crla.org/">http://crla.org/</a></p>

## DISASTER HELP CENTERS

### DISASTER RECOVERY CENTERS

#### What is a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center?

A FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) is a facility where those affected by the wildfires may go for information about FEMA programs or other disaster assistance programs and to ask questions related to their situation. Representatives from the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, FEMA, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), volunteer groups, and other agencies are at DRCs to answer questions about disaster assistance and low-interest disaster loans for homeowners, renters, and businesses. They can also help survivors apply for federal disaster assistance.

As of October 20, 2017, the following is the only DRC that has been established in Northern California, but this information could change:

#### **Sonoma County: Hanna Boys Center, 1700 Arnold Dr., Sonoma, CA 95476**

- Hours of Operation: Monday – Sunday, 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- Services:
  - FEMA
    - FEMA, Other
    - Hazard Mitigation
    - Housing Assistance
    - Other Needs Assistance
    - Teleregistration
    - Web Registration
  - Federal
    - Federal, Other
    - Internal Revenue Service
    - Small Business Administration Home Loan
    - U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - State/Local
    - Aging/Senior Services
    - Crisis Counseling
    - State Health Services
    - State Housing Services
    - State/Local, Other
  - Other
    - General Information
    - Legal Referrals
    - Other
    - Volunteer Organizations

Additional DRCs may be added in the future. Please check the FEMA website here: <https://asd.fema.gov/inter/locator/mobile.htm> for up-to-date information.

### LOCAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS

#### What are Local Assistance Centers?

A number of Local Assistance Centers (LACs) are open to assist those impacted by the California wildfires. LACs include representatives from the Employment Development Department and other local, state, and federal agencies, as well as non-profit and voluntary organizations with disaster assistance programs and services, including unemployment benefits and payroll tax extensions for employers. The locations and hours of LACs are subject to change. For a current list of locations, please visit California Governor's Office of Emergency Services – LAC website here: <http://www.oesnews.com/local-assistance-centers-are-available-for-wildfire-victims-in-california-counties-in-orange-sonoma/>.

## STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY QUICK PHONE LIST

FEMA .....	(800) 621-3362
TTY line.....	(800) 462-7585
<a href="http://www.fema.gov">www.fema.gov</a>	
California Attorney General's Office.....	(800) 952-5225
TTY – English.....	(800) 735-2929
TTY – Spanish .....	(800) 855-3000
<a href="http://www.oag.ca.gov">www.oag.ca.gov</a>	
California Contractors State License Board (disaster hotline).....	(800) 962-1125
<a href="http://www.cslb.ca.gov">www.cslb.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Business Oversight (lender licensing).....	(866) 275-2677
Alternative number .....	(916) 327-7585
TTY line.....	(800) 735-2922
<a href="http://www.dbo.ca.gov">www.dbo.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Insurance .....	(800) 927-4357
TTY line.....	(800) 482-4833
<a href="http://www.insurance.ca.gov">www.insurance.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Insurance (licensing issues).....	(800) 967-9331
<a href="http://www.insurance.ca.gov">www.insurance.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV).....	(800) 777-0133
TTY line.....	(800) 735-2929
<a href="http://www.dmv.ca.gov">www.dmv.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Social Services.....	(800) 952-5253
Alternative number .....	(916) 651-8848
TTY line.....	(800) 952-8349
<a href="http://www.cdss.ca.gov">www.cdss.ca.gov</a>	
California Dept. of Toxic Substances Control.....	(800) 728-6942
Alternative number.....	(916) 324-2439
TTY line.....	(800) 855-7100
<a href="http://www.dtsc.ca.gov">www.dtsc.ca.gov</a>	
California Employment Development Office .....	(800) 300-5616
SDI benefits.....	(800) 480-3287
TTY line.....	(800) 563-2441
<a href="http://www.edd.ca.gov">www.edd.ca.gov</a>	
California Franchise Tax Board .....	(800) 338-0505
Alternative number .....	(800) 852-5711
TTY line.....	(800) 822-6268
<a href="http://www.ftb.ca.gov">www.ftb.ca.gov</a>	
California Office of Emergency Services .....	(916) 845-8510
(disaster assistance division)	
Alternative number.....	(916) 845-8149
<a href="http://www.caloes.ca.gov">www.caloes.ca.gov</a>	
Butte County Assessor's Office .....	(530) 538-7721
<a href="http://www.buttecounty.net/assessor/Home.aspx">www.buttecounty.net/assessor/Home.aspx</a>	
Lake County Assessor's Office .....	(707) 263-2302
<a href="http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm">www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm</a>	
Mendocino County Assessor's Office .....	(707) 234-6800
<a href="http://www.mendocinocounty.org">www.mendocinocounty.org</a>	
Napa County Assessor's Office .....	(707) 253-4467
Alternative number.....	(707) 259-8740
<a href="http://www.countyofnapa.org/Assessor/">www.countyofnapa.org/Assessor/</a>	

## STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY QUICK PHONE LIST

Nevada County Assessor's Office .....	(530) 265-1232
<a href="http://www.mynevadacounty.com/163/Assessor">www.mynevadacounty.com/163/Assessor</a>	
Sonoma County Assessor's Office .....	(707) 565-1888
Alternative number .....	(707) 565-3010
TTY line .....	(707) 565-6888
<a href="http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Assessor/">sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Assessor/</a>	
Yuba County Assessor's Office .....	(530) 749-7820
<a href="http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Assessor/">www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Assessor/</a>	
Small Business Administration (SBA) .....	(800) 488-5323
Alternative number (Nevada, Yuba).....	(916) 735-1700
Alternative number (Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma)....	(415) 744-6820
TTY line .....	(800) 877 8339
<a href="http://www.sba.gov">www.sba.gov</a>	
State Bar of California (attorney contact information).....	(415) 538-2000
<a href="http://www.calbar.ca.gov">www.calbar.ca.gov</a>	
State Bar of California (lawyer referral service) .....	(866) 442-2529
<a href="http://www.calbar.ca.gov">www.calbar.ca.gov</a>	
United States Citizenship & Immigration Services.....	(800) 375-5283
TTY line .....	(800) 877-8339
<a href="http://www.uscis.gov">www.uscis.gov</a>	
United States Internal Revenue Service .....	(800) 829-1040
Santa Rosa Office .....	(707) 535-3859
San Francisco Office.....	(415) 553-8990
Sacramento Office .....	(916) 974-5225
<a href="http://www.irs.gov">www.irs.gov</a>	
United States Social Security Administration.....	(800) 772-1213
TTY line .....	(800) 325-0778
<a href="http://www.ssa.gov">www.ssa.gov</a>	

## OTHER RESOURCES

### [Agriculture](#) – [Healthcare](#) – [Miscellaneous](#)

#### California State

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services – October Wildfires Resources & Information, <http://wildfirerecovery.org/>

#### California Counties

##### Is assistance with my wildfire-related concerns available in my local county?

Many county agencies and other organizations may be able to offer assistance directly, or by referral to other appropriate agencies. Contact numbers, organized by county, are set forth below.

##### **Butte County:** <https://www.buttecounty.net/>

Agriculture and Natural Resources: (530) 538-7201, [http://cebutte.ucanr.edu/Agriculture\\_Natural\\_Resources/](http://cebutte.ucanr.edu/Agriculture_Natural_Resources/)

Agricultural Commissioner: (530) 538-7381, <http://www.buttecounty.net/agriculturalcommissioner/Home.aspx>

Animal Services: (530) 538-7409, <http://www.buttecounty.net/publichealth/Animals.aspx>

Assessor: (530) 538-7721, <http://www.buttecounty.net/assessor/>

Clerk-Recorder: (530) 538-7691, <https://clerk-recorder.buttecounty.net/recorder/rechome.html>

Development Services Department: (530) 538-7601 (permits), <http://www.buttecounty.net/dds/>

Office of Emergency Services: (530) 538-7373 (disaster preparedness, Fire Assistance Center), <http://www.buttecounty.net/oem/>

Environmental Health: (530) 538-7281, <http://www.buttecounty.net/ph/EnvironmentalHealth.aspx>

Fire Department: (530) 538-7111, <http://www.buttecounty.net/fire/>

Housing Authority: (530) 895-4474, <http://www.butte-housing.com/>

Public Health: (530) 538-7581, <http://www.buttecounty.net/publichealth/>

Public Works: (530) 538-7681, <http://www.buttecounty.net/publicworks/>

Sheriff's Office: (530) 538-7321, <http://www.buttecounty.net/sheriffcoroner/>

Employment and Social Services: (877) 410-8803, <http://www.buttecounty.net/dess/>

Tax Collector: (530) 538-7701, <http://www.buttecounty.net/treasurertaxcollector/>

Donation Information: <https://www.buttecounty.net/>

2-1-1 Butte County: <http://www.helpcentral.org/>

Facebook (Sheriff's Office): <https://www.facebook.com/bcsonews/>

Twitter (Sheriff's Office): <https://twitter.com/buttasheriff>

##### **Lake County:** <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/>

Agriculture: (707) 263-0217, <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Ag.htm>

Animal Care & Control: (707) 263-0278, [http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Animal\\_Care\\_And\\_Control.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Animal_Care_And_Control.htm)

Assessor: (707) 263-2302, <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm>

Clerk-Recorder: (707) 263-2293, <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Assessor-Recorder.htm>

Community Development: (707) 263-2221 (building and safety; permits; disaster assistance),

[http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Community\\_Development.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Community_Development.htm)

Environmental Health: (707) 263-1164, [http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Environmental\\_Health.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Environmental_Health.htm)

Housing Programs: (707) 995-3744,

[http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Social\\_Services/Programs/Housing.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Social_Services/Programs/Housing.htm)

Office of Emergency Services: (707) 262-4090, <http://www.lakesheriff.com/About/OES.htm>

Public Health: (707) 263-1090, <http://health.co.lake.ca.us/>

Public Works: (707) 263-2341, [http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Public\\_Works.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Public_Works.htm)

Sheriff's Office: (707) 262-4200, <http://www.lakesheriff.com/>

Social Services: (707) 995-4200, [http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Social\\_Services.htm](http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Social_Services.htm)

Tax Collector: (707) 263-2234, <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/tax.htm>

Fire Debris Management: Frequently Asked Questions: (707) 263-2580,

<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Assets/Departments/CDD/Valley+Fire/Fire+Debris+Management.pdf>

Facebook (Office of Emergency Services): <https://www.facebook.com/LakeCountyOES>



## OTHER RESOURCES

Twitter (Office of Emergency Services): <https://www.facebook.com/LakeCountyOES>  
Nixle Alerts & Advisories (Sheriff's Office): <http://www.lakesheriff.com/Services/nixle.htm>

**Mendocino County:** <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/>

Agriculture: (707) 234-6830, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/agriculture>

Animal Care Services: (707) 463-4427, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/animal-care-services>

Assessor: (707) 234-6800, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/assessor-county-clerk-recorder-elections/assessor-services-forms>

Clerk-Recorder: (707) 234-6822, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/assessor-county-clerk-recorder-elections/count-recorder>

Environmental Health: (707) 234-6625, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/health-and-human-services-agency/environmental-health>

Office of Emergency Services: (707) 467-6497, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/executive-office/office-of-emergency-services>

Planning & Building Services: Ukiah (707) 234-6650; Fort Bragg (707) 964-5379, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/planning-building-services>

Public Health: (707) 472-2700, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/health-and-human-services-agency/public-health>

Sheriff's Office: (707) 463-4411, <http://www.mendocinosheriff.com/>

Tax Collector: (707) 234-6875, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/collections/treasurer-tax-collector>

Transportation: (707) 463-4363 (public works), <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/government/transportation>

Mendocino County Fire Information for October 2017 Wildfires: <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/community/mendocino-county-fire-information>

Redwood Fire Ash and Burn Debris Clean-up Removal: (707) 463-4441, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/home/showdocument?id=12334>

Redwood Fire Debris Clean-up Frequently Asked Questions: (707) 234-6625, <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/home/showdocument?id=12340>

2-1-1 Mendocino: <http://211mendocino.org/>

Facebook (County of Mendocino): <https://www.facebook.com/mendocinocounty/>

Facebook (Sheriff's Office): <https://www.facebook.com/MendocinoSheriff/>

Twitter (Sheriff's Office): <https://twitter.com/mendosheriff>

**Napa County:** <http://countyofnapa.org/>

Agricultural Commissioner: (707) 253-4357, <http://www.countyofnapa.org/AgCom/>

Animal Control: (707) 253-4509, <http://countyofnapa.org/Sheriff/AnimalControl/>

Assessor: (707) 253-4466, <http://countyofnapa.org/Assessor/>

Building Division: (707) 253-4417 (permits), <http://countyofnapa.org/PBES/Building/>

Clerk-Recorder: (707) 253-4105, <http://countyofnapa.org/Recorder-Clerk/>

Environmental Health Division: (707) 253-4471, <http://countyofnapa.org/PBES/Environmental/>

Fire Department: (707) 299-1466, <http://countyofnapa.org/CountyFire/>

Health and Human Services Agency: (707) 253-4279, <http://countyofnapa.org/HHSA/>

Housing & Intergovernmental Affairs: (707) 253-4112, <http://countyofnapa.org/ceo/hia/>

Public Works: (707) 253-4351, <http://countyofnapa.org/PublicWorks/>

Sheriff's Office: (707) 253-4509, <http://countyofnapa.org/Sheriff/>

Social Services Agency: (707) 253-4511, <http://www.countyofnapa.org/HHSA/SelfSufficiency/>

Tax Collector: (707) 253-4327, <http://countyofnapa.org/Treasurer/>

Donation Information: <http://www.napavalleycf.org/>

Facebook (County of Napa): <https://www.facebook.com/NapaCounty/>

Facebook (Sheriff's Office): <https://www.facebook.com/NapaCountySO/>

Twitter (County of Napa): <https://twitter.com/CountyofNapa>

Nixle (Sheriff's Office): <https://local.nixle.com/city/ca/napa/>

**Nevada County:** <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/>

Agricultural Commissioner: (530) 470-2690, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/982/Agricultural-Commissioner>

Animal Control: (530) 265-1471, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/208/Animal-Control>

Assessor: (530) 265-1232, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/163/Assessor>

## OTHER RESOURCES

Clerk-Recorder: (530) 265-1221, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/235/Clerk-Recorder>  
Environmental Health: (530) 265-1222, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1470/Environmental-Health>  
Farm Advisor Division: (530) 889-7385, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1660/Farm-Advisor-Division>  
Fire Districts: <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1314/Fire-Districts>  
Housing & Community Services: (530) 265-1645, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/539/Housing-Community-Services>  
Lobo and McCourtney Fire Recovery: (530) 265-1218, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/2357/Lobo-and-McCourtney-Fire-Recovery>  
Office of Emergency Services: (530) 265-1515, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1182/Office-of-Emergency-Services>  
Permits: (530) 265-1222, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/179/Permits>  
Public Health: (530) 265-1450, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/551/Public-Health>  
Public Works: (530) 265-1411, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/218/Public-Works>  
Sheriff's Office: (530) 265-1471, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/150/Sheriff-Coroner-Public-Administrator>  
Social Services: (530) 265-1340, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/879/Social-Services>  
Tax Collector: (530) 265-1285, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/348/Treasurer-Tax-Collector>  
Sand & Sandbags Available: (530) 265-1515, <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/1240/Sand-Sandbags-Available>  
2-1-1 Nevada County: <http://211connectingpoint.org/>  
Facebook (Nevada County): <https://www.facebook.com/NevadaCountyCA/>  
Facebook (Nevada County Office of Emergency Services): <https://www.facebook.com/NevadaCountyOES/>  
Twitter (Nevada County): <https://twitter.com/NevadaCountyCA>  
Twitter (Nevada County Office of Emergency Services): <https://twitter.com/NevCoOES>  
Wildfire Updates: <https://www.mynevadacounty.com/alertcenter.aspx?aid=4>

### **Solano County:** <http://www.solanocounty.com/>

Agriculture Department: (707) 784-1310, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/agriculture/default.asp>  
Animal Care Services: (707) 784-1356, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/animalcare/gi.asp>  
Assessor: (707) 784-6210, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ar/>  
Building and Safety Services: (707) 784-6765 (permits), <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/buildingsafety/about.asp>  
Clerk-Recorder: (707) 784-6200, [http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ar/recorder/recording\\_section/](http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ar/recorder/recording_section/)  
Environmental Health: (707) 784-6765, [http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/environmental\\_health/](http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/environmental_health/)  
Fire & Police Departments: <http://www.solanocounty.com/emergencies/firepolicedept.asp>  
Health & Social Services: (707) 784-8600, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/hss/>  
Housing Programs: (707) 449-5675, [http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/planning/housing\\_programs.asp](http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/planning/housing_programs.asp)  
Office of Emergency Services: (707) 784-1600, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/oes/>  
Public Health: (707) 784-8600, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ph/>  
Public Works: (707) 784-6765, [http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/public\\_works/](http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/rm/public_works/)  
Sheriff's Office: (707) 784-7000, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/sheriff/>  
Tax Collector: (707) 784-7485, <http://www.solanocounty.com/depts/ttcc/>  
Current Emergency Information: <http://solanocounty.azurewebsites.us/>  
Facebook (Solano County Sheriff's Office): <https://www.facebook.com/SolanoSheriff/>  
Twitter (Solano County Sheriff): <https://twitter.com/SolanoSheriff>

### **Sonoma County:** <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov>

Sonoma County Public Information Hotline, (707) 565-3856  
Agricultural Division: (707) 565-2371, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Agriculture-Weights-and-Measures/Agricultural-Division/>  
Animal Services: (707) 565-7100, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Animal-Services/>  
Assessor: (707) 565-1888, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Assessor/>  
Clerk-Recorder: (707) 565-3800, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CRA/Clerk-Recorder/>  
Community Development Commission: (707) 565-7500 (housing), <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Community-Development-Commission/>  
Debris and Ash Removal: (707) 565-3856, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety/News/JIC-Debris-Removal-October-17-8pm/>  
Emergency Management Division of the Fire and Emergency Services Department: (707) 565-1152, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/FES/Emergency-Management/>  
Environmental Health: (707) 565-6565, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Environmental-Health-and-Safety/>  
Fire and Emergency Services: (707) 565-1152, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Fire-and-Emergency-Services/>

## OTHER RESOURCES

Health Services Department: (707) 565-4700, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health-Services/>  
Human Services Department: (707) 565-5800 (economic assistance, benefit claims),  
<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Human-Services/>  
Permit & Resource Management Department: (707) 565-1900 (building permits), <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Permit-and-Resource-Management/>  
Transportation & Public Works: (707) 565-2231, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Transportation-and-Public-Works/>  
Sheriff's Office: (707) 565-2511, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Sheriff-s-Office/>  
Tax Collector: (707) 565-2631, <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax-Collector/>  
Fire Information (recovery resources, community information, local assistance center): <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/EOC-and-PIO/Fires-October-2017/Fire-Information/>  
Housing Resources (Permit Sonoma Planning Division and Community Development Commission) (if you are displaced by wildfires): <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/PRMD/Planning/Housing-Resources/>  
2-1-1 Sonoma Fire and Disaster Services (disaster and post disaster services): <http://211sonoma.org/fire-and-emergency-services-2/>  
Facebook (County of Sonoma): <https://www.facebook.com/SonomaCountyCal>  
Nixle (Sheriff's Office): <https://local.nixle.com/sonoma-county-sheriffs-office/>

### **Yuba County:** <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/>

Agricultural Commissioner: (530) 749-5400, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Ag/>  
Animal Care Services: (530) 749-7777, <http://sheriff.co.yuba.ca.us/Divisions/AnimalCare.aspx>  
Assessor: (530) 749-7820, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Assessor/>  
Building Department: (530) 749-5440 (permits),  
<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Community%20Development/Building/>  
Clerk-Recorder: (530) 749-7850, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/recorder/>  
Community Services: (530) 749-5470,  
<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/departments/Community%20Development/Community%20Services/>  
Environmental Health: (530) 749-5450, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Community%20Development/EH/>  
Fire Departments: <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/OES/ContactInformation.aspx>  
Health and Human Services Department: (530) 749-6366 (Public Health Division),  
<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/HHSD/>  
Housing Authority: Emergency shelter or housing, (530) 749-6311. Grant programs, (530) 749-5452,  
<http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Community%20Development/pubHousing.aspx>  
Office of Emergency Services: (530) 749-7520, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/OES/>  
Public Works: (530) 749-5420, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Community%20Development/Public%20Works/>  
Sheriff's Department: (530) 749-7777, <http://sheriff.co.yuba.ca.us/>  
Tax Collector: (530) 749-7840, <http://www.co.yuba.ca.us/Departments/Treasurer/>  
Yuba County, Cascade Fire information (steps to recovery after the wildfires): <http://yuba.org/cascadefire/>  
Facebook (Yuba County): <https://www.facebook.com/YubaCounty/>  
Facebook (Yuba County Office of Emergency Services): <https://www.facebook.com/YubaCountyOES/>  
Twitter (Yuba County): <https://twitter.com/YubaCounty>

### **Agriculture**

U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rural Development:  
<https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do?pageAction=RBSmenu&NavKey=property@13>  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, Disaster Assistance Programs:  
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/index>  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, State Offices, California: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/California/index>  
USDA Fire Recovery Assistance for California, October 2017: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/State-Offices/California/pdfs/USDA%20Fire%20Recovery%20Assistance%20CALIFORNIA.pdf>  
Contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture for recovery assistance for your farm at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

## OTHER RESOURCES

### **Mental Health and Healthcare**

#### **Short informational sheet on Healthcare Assistance for California Wildfire Victims (Napa and Sonoma Counties)**

(LawHelp.CA.org): <http://www.lawhelpca.org/Resource/baylegal-healthcare-assistance-ca-fire-victims-napa-and-sonoma-counties>

**Disaster Distress Helpline:** (800) 985-5990 is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after a disaster. Call **(800) 985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs to 66746** to connect with a trained crisis counselor. For assistance in Spanish call **(800) 985-5990, and press 2**, or text **Hablanos to 66746**.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** (800) 273-8255

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

**Red Cross Collection of Resources for Coping with a Disaster:**

<http://www.redcross.org/get-help/disaster-relief-and-recovery-services>

**Find Your Words:** Kaiser Permanente's publicly available website established to provide resources on depression

<https://findyourwords.org/>



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