



LOS ANGELES CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT
Palisades Fire After-Action Review Report

AARR Fact Sheet

About The Report

Following major incidents, the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) conducts After-Action Review Reports (AARRs) to evaluate performance, identify lessons learned, and improve protocols to ensure the Department is better equipped in future incidents.

The Palisades Fire After-Action Review Report (AARR) was created by a working group convened by the LAFD at the request of the Mayor's Office. The goal of this report is to identify lessons learned from the first 36 hours of response to enhance preparedness and response for future wildfires. While the AARR confirms much of what has already been shared publicly, it provides additional operational context and outlines clear steps to improve preparedness, response, and recovery.

While these reports are typically for internal use and not shared publicly, the LAFD is releasing this report in the interest of transparency, given the unprecedented impact and scale of the fire.

Methodology

The AARR was created by LAFD leadership, informed by nearly 100 interviews with officers, units, and support staff. The Department reviewed resource documentation; analyzed radio communications, photos, and videos; gathered eyewitness accounts; and collected other evidence to support and verify the information provided herein.

Key Findings

Response and Effective Actions:

The LAFD—alongside local, state, and federal partners—executed a coordinated response despite extreme weather conditions:

- **Rapid Deployment:** Ground and air resources arrived within minutes; water drops began within 10 minutes in steep and inaccessible terrain.
- **Safety & Resilience:** Response teams braved 36+ hours of relentless firefighting; safety protocols minimized injuries despite harsh conditions.
- **Lives Saved:** 30,000 residents evacuated safely, including elderly and vulnerable populations; multiple rescues facilitated from extremely hazardous scenarios.
- **Property Protection:** Crews saved dozens of homes using specialized wildland–urban interface tactics and alternative water sources.
- **Interagency Coordination:** Strong interagency collaboration with LAFD, LAPD, and other city-and-state-wide agencies enabled resource sharing and airspace management.
- **Technology Use:** Real-time tracking systems optimized resource allocation; night aerial operations slowed the fire's advance.

Challenges:

The LAFD faced several environmental and operational challenges in its response:

- **Unprecedented Weather Conditions:** Rapidly spreading flames fueled by hurricane-force winds, steep terrain, and critically dry fuels created an unusually high fire danger, which ultimately impacted response time and resources.
- **Response Constraints:** Grounded aircrafts due to hurricane-force winds and simultaneous fires across the City of Los Angeles strained resources.
- **Communication Network Lapses:** Network issues and communication breakdowns delayed evacuation coordination.
- **Resource Shortages:** Staffing gaps due to budget constraints, overtime fatigue, and approved absences limited available crews and equipment.
- **Water Supply Limitations:** Some areas lacked access to traditional hydrants, requiring alternative sourcing.

Key Improvements Implemented:

The LAFD has already begun making changes based on findings, including:

- **Leadership Changes:** Since January 2025, the LAFD has made 19 leadership changes, including the Mayor's appointment of Interim Fire Chief Ronnie Villanueva, who brings more than 41 years of leadership and crisis management experience to the LAFD.
- **Strengthened Recall Protocols:** During Red Flag Warnings, all staff will be immediately recalled and all available apparatus staffed, regardless of external factors or financial impact.
- **Strengthened Interagency Collaboration:** Created new ways to share information to coordinate quickly during emergencies; weekly updates from the LAFD Fire Marshal are now shared with LADWP senior leadership on hydrant and water reserve status to ensure maximum preparedness.
- **City Leadership Notification:** The Mayor and key City leaders will be notified and updated throughout any emergency.
- **Innovating and Improving Training at All Levels:** Upgrading weather-tracking tools, reviewing our warning sirens, and improving staff recall systems to alert the community faster. LAFD members will receive expanded hands-on training in wildfire response, evacuation, and protecting homes – they will run yearly evacuation drills based on real fire data and make sure every high-risk neighborhood has at least two safe ways out.
- **Clearer Roles & Responsibilities:** Defined duties for every position during emergencies to reduce confusion and improve response times.
- **Advanced Communications:** Added redundancy tools like Starlink to maintain communication when traditional networks fail.
- **Updated Pre-Deployment Model:** Moving resources into place earlier and holding tactical meetings sooner after red-flag warnings.
- **Increased Public Education:** Upgrading weather-tracking tools, reviewing warning sirens, and improving staff recall systems to alert the community faster.
- **Water Sourcing:** Continued training of all members on methods for acquiring alternative water sources outside of the traditional hydrant system – including pools, reservoirs, etc.
- **Community Education:** Working closely with MySafe:LA to ensure that all LA residents have access to critical life-saving instructions, up-to-date information, and resources to prepare and survive a wildfire.

- ***Technology Improvements:*** Upgraded LAFD Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) drones with NOVA fire mapping software and automated hotspot detection.
- ***Enhanced Evacuation Procedures:*** New and significantly improved evacuation exercises with a new software program, Genasys Protect, which will now be used across all regions in Los Angeles County, to help reinforce new processes, including proper and efficient civilian evacuation.

###