City Council Meeting
03-23-26
**Item 7.A.**

# Council Agenda Report

To: Mayor Silverstein and the Honorable Members of the City Council

Prepared by: Susan Dueñas, Public Safety Director

Approved by: Rob Duboux, Interim City Manager

Date prepared: February 17, 2026 Meeting date: March 23, 2026

Subject: After-Action Review of the City's Response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires (Continued from March 9, 2026)

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Receive and file a report on the After-Action Review of the City's Response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: This item supports the City's 2025 Strategic Plan Goal 4: Improve Public Safety.

DISCUSSION: The City of Malibu has completed an independent After-Action Review (AAR) evaluating the City's emergency management and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) response to the Franklin Fire (December 2024) and Palisades Fire (January 2025).

Prepared by Witt O'Brien's, a nationally recognized emergency management and disaster response firm, the report provides a comprehensive, forward-looking assessment of how the City coordinated emergency operations, communications, evacuations, and recovery support during two unprecedented wildfire events.

The report focuses on the City's emergency management systems and how the City organized, supported, and sustained operations to protect public safety, maintain continuity of government, and serve residents during prolonged, highly complex emergencies. Importantly, this report is not an evaluation of wildfire suppression, firefighting tactics, or fire origin. Those functions fall under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County Fire Department and other responding agencies. The Los Angeles County After Action Reviews for the Eaton and Palisades Fires can be found at https://lacounty.gov/aar/.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement across ten focus areas: preparedness, EOC operations, governance, communications, evacuation coordination, technology, procurement, and workforce sustainability. It highlights the extraordinary dedication of City staff, effective interagency coordination, and innovative communication practices, and outlines actionable recommendations to strengthen readiness, resilience, and continuity for future large-scale disasters.

Some of the recommendations have already been implemented, such as:

- Establish an EOC Policy Group (Recommendation 2.1);
- Institutionalize the formal EOC Planning Process (Recommendation 2.2)
- Customize a Microsoft Teams Channel for EOC use (Recommendation 4.5 and 8.1)

In addition, many of the recommendations are in the process of being implemented, such as:

- Adopt Citywide emergency staff policies (Recommendation 1.2)
- Develop a comprehensive disaster recovery plan (Recommendation 1.3)
- Establish Agreements for alternate EOC facilities (Recommendation 1.4)
- Develop EOC relocation policies and procedures (Recommendation 2.4, 6.1, 10.3)
- Augment EOC staffing capacity (Recommendation 4.8, 10.1)
- Establish new communication and alert mechanisms (Recommendation 5.5)

The City commissioned this review to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. The findings will help guide future investments, policy development, training, and planning as Malibu prepares for increasingly frequent and severe wildfire events.

The After-Action Review will also be submitted to the State of California in accordance with State reporting requirements.

ATTACHMENTS:
1) Q&A: After-Action Review of the Franklin and Palisades Fires
2) After Action Review of the City's Response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires

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# Q&A: After-Action Review of the Franklin and Palisades Fires

**Q: What is the After-Action Review?**
The After-Action Review (AAR) is an independent report prepared by Witt O'Brien's, a nationally recognized emergency management and disaster response firm. The report provides a comprehensive, forward-looking assessment of how the City coordinated emergency operations, communications, evacuations, and recovery support during the 2024 Franklin Fire and the 2025 Palisades Fire.

The review evaluated the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) functions, governance processes, coordination with partner agencies, public communication efforts, evacuation procedures, technology systems, and workforce sustainability during these incidents.

**Q: Why did the City commission the After-Action Review?**
The City commissioned the report to understand what worked well, identify opportunities for improvement, and strengthen emergency preparedness for future disasters.

The Franklin and Palisades Fires were among the most significant disasters in Malibu's history. Conducting an independent After-action Review following major emergencies is a nationally recognized best practice. The goal is continuous improvement. The report is forward-looking and focused on strengthening systems for the future.

**Q: Was the City prepared for these fires?**
The report recognizes that City staff demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and strong coordination under extremely challenging conditions, including power shutoffs, infrastructure disruptions and multiple Emergency Operations Center relocations.

At the same time, the scale and duration of these fires tested every aspect of the City's emergency management system. The review identifies ways to formalize and strengthen processes to match the increasing frequency and severity of wildfire events.

Preparedness is not static. Continuous improvement is part of responsible emergency management.

**Q: Does the report include recommendations?**
Yes. Like all After-Action reviews, the report includes recommendations to help improve emergency operations.
These recommendations focus on strengthening:

- Training and Exercises
- Governance structures during major incidents
- Backup communication systems and technology redundancies
- Evacuation coordination and re-entry planning
- Documentation and financial tracking for disaster reimbursement
- Continuity planning and Emergency Operations Center relocation protocols
- Workforce sustainability during prolonged emergency activations.

Some improvements are already underway, and others will be evaluated through future policy discussions and budget considerations.

**Q: Is this a report on firefighting tactics or why structures burned?**
No. The report does not evaluate firefighting tactics, fire suppression activities, or fire origin. Those responsibilities fall under Los Angeles County and state agencies. LA County released an After-Action Review on the Eaton and Palisades Fire in September, 2025, which is available to view here: https://lacounty.gov/aar/.

This report focuses specifically on the City of Malibu's emergency management role, including coordination and communication, evacuation support, and continuity of city operations during the fires.

**Q: What does the report say worked well?**
The report highlights several strengths demonstrated during the fires, including:

- Strong coordination with Los Angeles County and partner agencies

- Effective public communication efforts, including daily briefings and public information updates
- The use of emergency alert systems and online communication tools
- The ability to maintain emergency operations despite multiple Emergency Operations Center relocations
- The dedication, resilience, and adaptability of City staff
- Valuable field coordination through Fire Safety Liaisons

The report acknowledges the City personnel sustained operations under extremely challenging conditions and that many systems functioned because of staff commitment and collaboration.

**Q: What challenges or areas for improvement does the report identify?**
The report identifies opportunities to strengthen systems and procedures in several areas, particularly given the increasing complexity of wildfire events.

These Include:

- Formalizing emergency governance and decision-making structures
- Expanding training and building deeper staffing capacity
- Strengthening backup communications and technology redundancy
- Improving evacuation zone coordination and re-entry planning
- Standardizing documentation and resource tracking for disaster reimbursement
- Enhancing continuity planning, including Emergency Operations Center relocation procedures.

The report emphasizes that many systems worked because of staff dedication. The recommendations are intended to reinforce and institutionalize those systems for future emergencies.

**Q: Why were there multiple Emergency Operations Center relocations?**
During both fires, the City's primary Emergency Operations Center was impacted by fire conditions and infrastructure disruptions, requiring evacuation and relocation to alternate facilities to maintain operations.

City staff successfully sustained operations despite these moves. The report recommends formalizing relocation protocols and strengthening continuity planning to ensure smoother transitions in future incidents.

Maintaining continuity during fast-moving disasters is complex, and the City is evaluating ways to further strengthen this capability.

**Q: Will the City implement the recommendations?**
The City will carefully review the recommendations and prioritize actions that strengthen public safety and emergency readiness.
Some improvements can be implemented administratively, while others may require policy updates, coordination with regional partners, or future budget discussions.

Implementation will occur over time and will be discussed publicly through City Council and Commission meetings. Any actions requiring funding or policy changes will be considered at the direction of the City Council.

**Q: Will implementing these recommendations increase City spending?**
Some recommendations involve internal procedural improvements, training updates, or enhancing emergency planning systems. Any actions that require funding would be reviewed by the City Council through the normal public budget process.

If future investments are considered, they would be evaluated carefully, with transparency and public input.

**Q: Is this report submitted to the State?**
Yes. The report will be submitted to the State of California, as required.

**Q: Does this review affect rebuilding or recovery after the fires?**
No. The After-Action Report focuses on emergency operations during the fires.
Rebuilding and long-term recovery efforts are addressed through separate processes and policies. However, lessons learned from this report may inform future recovery planning.

**Q: Why did it take nearly one year to complete the After Action Review?**
A: The City contracted with Witt O'Brien's in April of 2025 and began the review process shortly thereafter.

After Action Reviews for major disasters typically take several months to complete, this timeline was extended due to unexpected staffing changes within the consultant's organization that required the reassignment of project leadership.

In addition, the scale and complexity of the Franklin and Palisades Fires required extensive review and contributed to the overall timeline. Throughout this process, the City's priority was to ensure the review was thorough, accurate, and reliable so the community could have confidence in the findings.


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**Q: Can residents review the report and share feedback?**
Yes. The report is available to the public on the City's website as part of the March 9 City Council agenda and on the Public Safety webpage. It will be discussed at the March 9 City Council meeting and the April 1 Public Safety Commission meeting. Both meetings are open to the public and include opportunities for public comment. Community input is welcome. Viewing and commenting instructions are included with the March 9 City Council meeting agenda, which is posted on the City website at: www.MalibuCity.org/agendacenter.

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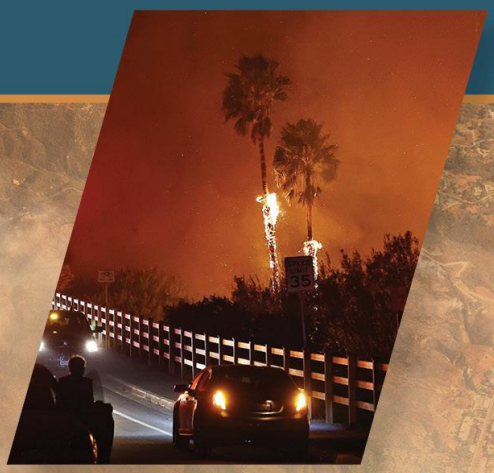
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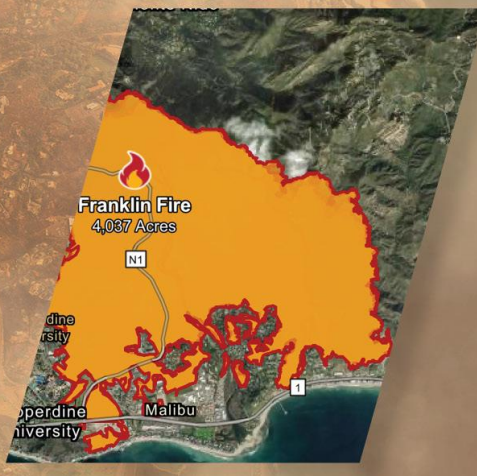
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DECEMBER 2025

# After-Action Review of the City's Response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires










# Table of Contents


Disclaimers ..... 5
Handling Instructions ..... 5
About Witt O'Brien's ..... 5
Acknowledgements ..... 5

**SECTION 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 6**

**SECTION 2 - SCOPE ..... 7**

Methodology ..... 7
Data Collection ..... 7
Franklin Fire – Summary of Events ..... 8
**Franklin Fire Timeline** ..... 9
Palisades Fire – Summary of Events ..... 10
**Palisades Fire Timeline** ..... 12

**SECTION 3 - STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 14**

Overview ..... 14

**Focus Area #1: Preparedness ..... 16**

Focus Area #1 Strengths ..... 16
Focus Area #1 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 17
Challenge #1 – Frequency of Emergency Response Training & Exercises ..... 17
Challenge #2 – Citywide Emergency Policy for Staff ..... 17
Challenge #3 – Recovery Planning ..... 18
Challenge #4 – EOC Continuity & Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) ..... 18
Challenge #5 – Volunteer & Donations Management ..... 19

**Focus Area #2: EOC & Incident Management ..... 20**

Focus Area #2 Strengths ..... 21
Focus Area #2 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 21
Challenge #1 – City Leadership Alignment ..... 21
Challenge #2 – Incident Planning ..... 22
Challenge #3 – Documentation and Cost Recovery ..... 22
Challenge #4 – EOC Continuity and Relocation ..... 23
Challenge #5 – Mobile Command ..... 24

**Focus Area #3: Governance & Policy ..... 26**

Focus Area #3 Strengths ..... 26

Focus Area #3 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 26
Challenge #1 – Elected Officials Integration ..... 26
Challenge #2 – Executive Decision-Making ..... 27
Challenge #3 – Leadership Expectations During Relocation ..... 28

**Focus Area #4: Operational Coordination ..... 29**

Focus Area #4 Strengths ..... 29
Focus Area #4 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 30
Challenge #1 – Fire Liaison Integration ..... 30
Challenge #2 – Resource Tracking ..... 30
Challenge #3 – Situation Unit Personnel ..... 30
Challenge #4 – Staff Role Assignments ..... 31
Challenge #5 – Technology & Collaboration Tools ..... 32
Challenge #6 – Regional Coordination ..... 33
Challenge #7 – Geographic Coordination ..... 34
Challenge #8 –EOC Staff Augmentation ..... 35

**Focus Area #5: Communication ..... 36**

Focus Area #5 Strengths ..... 36
Focus Area #5 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 37
Challenge #1 – Systemwide Communications Loss ..... 37
Challenge #2 – Alternate EOC Communication ..... 37
Challenge #3 – Staff Communication ..... 37
Challenge #4 – Emergency Alert and Warning ..... 38
Challenge #5 – Power & Telecommunications Outages ..... 39

**Focus Area #6: Community Evacuation ..... 40**

Focus Area #6 Strengths ..... 40
Focus Area #6 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 41
Challenge #1 – Evacuation Procedures for City Hall ..... 41
Challenge #2 –Evacuation Coordination ..... 41
Challenge #3 – Evacuation Zone Management ..... 41
Challenge #4 – Re-entry and Repopulation Planning ..... 42

**Focus Area #7: Emergency Public Information ..... 43**

Focus Area #7 Strengths ..... 43
Focus Area #7 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 44
Challenge #1 – Social Media & Public Information ..... 44
Challenge #2 – Elected Official Briefings ..... 45
Challenge #3 – Joint Information Center (JIC) ..... 45

Challenge #4 –Public Information Support ..... 46

**Focus Area #8: Technology ..... 47**

Focus Area #8 Strengths ..... 47

Focus Area #8 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 48

Challenge #1 – Virtual Collaboration Tools ..... 48

Challenge #2 – Geographic Information System (GIS) Capability ..... 48

Challenge #3 – Shared Drives and Network Access During EOC Relocations ..... 49

Challenge #4 –Situational Awareness Tools ..... 49

**Focus Area #9: Emergency Purchasing Process ..... 50**

Focus Area #9 Strengths ..... 50

Focus Area #9 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 50

Challenge #1 – Emergency Procurement Policy ..... 50

Challenge #2 – Standardized Recordkeeping Practices ..... 51

Challenge #3 – Pre-Negotiated Vendor Agreements ..... 51

Challenge #4 – Integration of Procurement into Continuity Planning ..... 51

**Focus Area #10: Workforce & Staff Sustainability ..... 52**

Focus Area #10 Strengths ..... 53

Focus Area #10 Challenges & Recommendations ..... 53

Challenge #1 – EOC Staff Fatigue and Sustainability ..... 53

Challenge #2 – Assignment and Deployment ..... 54

Challenge #3 – EOC Relocation Impacts ..... 54

Challenge #4 – Training Participation and Incentives ..... 54

Challenge #5 – Compensation and Equity ..... 55

Challenge #6 – Continuity of Operations ..... 55

Challenge #7 – Behavioral Health and Wellness ..... 56

**SECTION 4 - CLOSING SUMMARY ..... 57**

**APPENDIX I: ACRONYMS ..... 58**

**APPENDIX II: IMPROVEMENT PLAN ..... 59**

## Disclaimers

This report was prepared by Witt O'Brien's under contract with the City of Malibu. The strengths, challenges, recommendations, and conclusions are provided solely for the use and benefit of the requesting party. Any warranties (expressed and/or implied) are specifically waived. Any statements, allegations, and recommendations in this report should not be construed as a governing policy or decision unless so designated by other documentation. This report is based on the most accurate and current data available to Witt O'Brien's at the time of publication and is, therefore, subject to change without notice. Provided to the City of Malibu in December 2025.

## Handling Instructions

This report is the property of the City of Malibu. It is intended as an internal document to be used by the City for improvement to its emergency response capabilities. The release of any or all of this document will be coordinated through the City of Malibu.

## About Witt O'Brien's

Witt O'Brien's is a global leader in emergency preparedness, crisis management, and disaster response and recovery. Witt O'Brien's has worked with public and private sector organizations throughout the United States to enhance, improve, and implement their emergency planning, training, and exercise programs, as well as assist and assess prevention, protection, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery operations. For the past 15 years, Witt O'Brien's has been supporting communities and others in the development of independent after-action reports that identify critical challenges, highlight capabilities that require enhancement, and establish roadmaps for future success in emergency management.

## Acknowledgements

Witt O'Brien's acknowledges and appreciates the cooperation of the City of Malibu for their observations, input, and ideas in the development of this report. We are grateful for the absolute and dedicated commitment to serving the residents of the City of Malibu throughout these disasters.

# SECTION 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2024 and early 2025, the City of Malibu was directly impacted by two major wildfire events: the Franklin Fire (December 2024) and the Palisades Fire (January 2025). Together, these incidents burned thousands of acres across the City, destroyed or damaged thousands of structures, forced mass evacuations, disrupted utilities and communications, and tragically resulted in loss of life. [1] [2]Malibu sustained significant damage, including more than 700 structures destroyed during the Palisades Fire, making these events among the most consequential disasters in the City's history.[3]

This After-Action Report (AAR), requested by the City of Malibu, provides an objective assessment of the City's response to these fires. The review evaluates both strategic and operational aspects of Malibu's emergency management system and identifies lessons to strengthen preparedness for future large-scale incidents.

The report documents key strengths that had a meaningful impact on the City's response:

- **Organizational Structure:** Placement of emergency management at the departmental level elevated visibility and facilitated peer-level coordination.
- **Staff Dedication:** City personnel demonstrated adaptability, commitment, and resilience, maintaining EOC operations under highly challenging conditions.
- **Fire Liaison Support:** Integration of Fire Liaisons provided valuable intelligence, situational awareness, and stronger coordination with incident command.
- **Public Information Practices:** The Public Information Guide (PIG), daily elected official briefings, and contracted PIO/vendor support proved highly effective in maintaining communication with leadership and the community.

At the same time, the fires revealed critical challenges where improvements are needed:

- **Staffing and Training:** Limited depth and inconsistent training created challenges with EOC roles, responsibilities, and processes.
- **Planning Gaps:** The absence of a pre-disaster recovery plan and a few other recovery documents (such as a re-entry plan) would have made the transition from response to recovery a bit more cohesive.
- **Documentation and Procurement:** The need for better resource tracking, financial documentation, and emergency procurement policies limited cost recovery compliance and efficiency.

[1] https://www.malibucity.org/1168/Palisades-Fire-Incident-Information-Arch
[2] https://www.malibucity.org/franklinfire
[3] https://abc7.com/post/california-wildfires-rebuilding-malibu-palisades-fire-is-complex-moving-slow/18096436/

- **Communications and Evacuation:** Limitations in infrastructure, staff communication processes, and evolving evacuation zone messaging at times made it harder for residents and partners to access consistent information.

The strengths, challenges and recommendations are organized under ten Focus Areas:

- Preparedness
- EOC & Incident Management
- Governance & Policy
- Operational Coordination
- Communication
- Community Evacuation
- Emergency Public Information
- Technology
- Emergency Purchasing Process
- Workforce & Staff Sustainability

Together, the observations made during the review highlight the City's strengths in commitment, coordination, and innovation, as well as the need to expand planning, continuity, and resilience measures. The Improvement Plan accompanying this report outlines specific, actionable steps to build upon strengths while addressing identified gaps, ensuring Malibu is better prepared for future large-scale emergencies.

# SECTION 2 - SCOPE

This After-Action Report (AAR) reviews the City of Malibu's preparedness, response, and coordination activities during the Franklin and Palisades Fires. The analysis focuses on Malibu's emergency management functions — including Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operations, interagency coordination, communication, evacuation, and continuity of services — while also acknowledging dependencies on Los Angeles County and state partners. The scope covers the period from December 9, 2024 (Franklin Fire) through March 7, 2025 (Malibu EOC deactivation) and is structured around ten thematic areas. The report does not evaluate wildfire suppression tactics or fire origin investigations, which fall under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County Fire Department and related agencies.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

To develop this report, the Witt O'Brien's team collected feedback from City personnel, as well as key partners using a variety of methods, including archival research, document review, informal discussions,

and formal interviews. The Witt O'Brien's team interviewed over 32 participants. The team also reviewed hundreds of pages of documentation, including City plans and policies, plus incident action plans, situation reports, and other data generated during the response.

The goals of the review included identifying areas highlighted as best practices, as well as identifying challenges and areas that should be improved. This is a forward-looking report – it does not intend to lay blame for any challenges; rather, it is intended to assist with enhancing the City's emergency management and response capabilities. All interviews were conducted with the understanding that comments would not be attributed to individuals.

This section provides an overview of the Franklin and Palisades wildfires, the weather conditions that fueled their rapid spread, and the City of Malibu's role and response during the incident. It is intended to give readers a clear understanding of the incident environment, the scale of impacts, and the broader operational context for Malibu's emergency management activities.

# Franklin Fire – Summary of Events

The Franklin Fire erupted on Monday, December 9, 2024, at approximately 11:00 p.m., near Malibu Canyon Road and Station Boundary, just outside of Malibu city limits. [4]Initially reported at only a few dozen acres, the fire grew quickly under the influence of powerful Santa Ana winds, which gusted over 50 mph and pushed flames across steep canyons and dry vegetation. The extreme weather prompted Southern California Edison to implement Public Safety Power Shut-offs (PSPS) resulting in widespread power outages, disrupting service to more than 40,000 customers, and forcing the shutdown of critical infrastructure and gas stations in the region. By the early hours of December 10, the fire had expanded to several hundred acres, prompting mandatory evacuations and closure of the Pacific Coast Highway and surrounding roads.[5] Within hours, thousands of residents were ordered to evacuate as the fire advanced toward neighborhoods, schools, City Hall and the campus of Pepperdine University, where students were directed to shelter-in-place.[6]

On December 10, local and state officials quickly escalated emergency actions. Governor Gavin Newsom secured a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), ensuring the availability of vital resources and financial support for suppression efforts. [7]More than

[4] https://fire.lacounty.gov/franklin-fire/
[5] https://abc7.com/post/timeline-how-franklin-fire-exploded-size-threatened-pepperdine-university-malibu/15642636/#:~:text=It%20was%20just%207%25%20contained.%20Here's%20a,Pepperdine%20University%20and%20seaside%20homes%20in%20Malibu.
[6] https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-12-10/malibu-endures-cellphone-power-outages-as-franklin-fire-burns#
[7] https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/Recovery/Applicant-Briefings/FACT-SHEET-Franklin-Fire-FM-5548-Los-Angeles-County.pdf

1,700 firefighters from 13 different agencies were deployed to combat the Franklin Fire, supported by helicopters, bulldozers, and hand crews working around the clock.[8]

Despite fierce winds, steep terrain, and critically dry fuels, containment progress was steadily achieved in the following days. On December 11, the fire grew to over 3,000 acres, but crews reported the first containment gains, enabling officials to begin coordinated repopulation efforts in some evacuated neighborhoods. [9]By December 13, most evacuation orders were downgraded to warnings, and the Pacific Coast Highway was fully reopened.[10]

After nine days of firefighting operations, the Franklin Fire was declared fully contained on December 18, 2024, with crews transitioning to recovery and debris removal efforts.[11]

The Franklin Fire, though smaller in scale than later incidents such as the Palisades Fire, was a highly destructive wildfire for the Malibu community. It forced mass evacuations, destroyed dozens of structures, disrupted education across the city, and highlighted vulnerabilities in infrastructure, evacuation routes, and community preparedness. Its rapid ignition and spread underscored the growing wildfire risks Malibu faces under intensifying Santa Ana wind events and prolonged drought conditions.

| Franklin Fire Timeline | |
|---|---|
| **December 8, 2024** | • City of Malibu issues alerts on city social media platforms advising the public of upcoming Red Flag Warning (12/9/24-12/11/24) and potential Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) power outages (12/9/24-12/11/24) |
| **December 9, 2024** | • **Franklin Fire starts at approximately 11:00 PM in the Santa Monica Mountains**<br>• City of Malibu activates the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)<br>• Evacuation orders issued<br>• City of Malibu issues Emergency Alerts on Everbridge Notification System<br>• Public Safety Power Shutoffs implemented |

[8] https://ktla.com/news/local-news/franklin-fire-in-malibu-still-smoldering-as-favorable-weather-conditions-aid-in-firefight/
[9] https://www.newsweek.com/franklin-fire-live-updates-1999040
[10] https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-12-14/franklin-fire-evacuation-orders-lifted-pch-reopens
[11] https://www.malibucity.org/franklinfire

| Franklin Fire Timeline | |
|---|---|
| **December 10, 2024** | • **Fire size estimated at 2,667 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (12/10/24))**<br>• Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) declared<br>• Evacuation orders and warnings issued<br>• City of Malibu issues Emergency Alerts on Everbridge Notification System<br>• City of Malibu EOC evacuates City Hall and relocates to Calabasas EOC<br>• City of Malibu coordinates with the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to set up Emergency Information and Supply Station<br>• Road closure of PCH<br>• Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) closed |
| **December 11, 2024** | • **Fire size estimated at 4,031 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (12/11/24))**<br>• **7% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report)**<br>• Power restored to some impacted areas |
| **December 12, 2024** | • **Fire size estimated at 4,037 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (12/12/24))**<br>• **30% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report)**<br>• City of Malibu issues alerts regarding repopulation for impacted areas<br>• 66% of residents return home<br>• 1,600 residents remain under evacuation orders |
| **December 18, 2024** | • **Fire size estimated at 4,037 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (12/18/24))**<br>• **100% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report)**<br>• City of Malibu EOC deactivates |

# Palisades Fire – Summary of Events

The Palisades Fire erupted on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at approximately 10:30 a.m. in the Santa Monica Mountains near Pacific Palisades. Initially reported at just 10 acres, the fire quickly accelerated in size due to a combination of severe drought, dry vegetation, and powerful Santa Ana winds that gusted as high as 80 mph. Within hours, the fire had grown to more than 700 acres, threatening thousands of homes and prompting the first broad evacuation orders at 12:07 p.m.[12] By early afternoon, over 10,000 homes were at immediate risk, as flames advanced into neighborhoods and canyon corridors. Mandatory road closures

[12] https://www.foxla.com/news/franklin-fire-malibu-schools-reopen-dec-16-2024

were implemented along key evacuation routes, including Pacific Coast Highway and Topanga Canyon Boulevard, to support life safety operations. [13]

The extreme fire weather prompted Southern California Edison to implement public safety power shutoffs across Malibu, leaving tens of thousands without power and cell service.[14]

Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency by the evening of January 7, and within 24 hours the president approved a Major Disaster Declaration, securing federal resources to assist in the firefighting effort. [15]Despite these actions, the intensity of the concurrent Santa Ana windstorm forced aerial firefighting operations to be grounded, limiting suppression efforts and allowing the blaze to spread unchecked overnight.

By January 8, the fire had grown to over 11,000 acres[16], with more than 180,000 people under evacuation orders. [17]Flames advanced into Malibu, destroying beachfront homes and overwhelming firefighting resources. At its height, the response drew more than 5,600 firefighting personnel, supported by hundreds of fire engines, bulldozers, helicopters, and international mutual aid resources from Canada and Mexico.

Traffic gridlock on the roads surrounding the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) forced some residents to abandon their cars and flee on foot. Nearly 200 abandoned vehicles were later removed by bulldozers to reopen critical routes for emergency responders.[18]

After nearly a month of continuous firefighting operations, the Palisades Fire was declared fully contained on January 31, 2025, 24 days after.[19]

The Palisades Fire was the tenth deadliest and third-most destructive wildfire in California history, and the most destructive fire ever to impact the area. [20]Its impacts spanned Malibu, Pacific Palisades, and Topanga, leaving entire neighborhoods destroyed, scarred landscapes across the Santa Monica Mountains, and unprecedented recovery challenges for affected communities.

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[13] https://abc7.com/post/pacific-coast-highway-partially-reopen-weeks-palisades-fire/15860332/
[14] https://www.foxla.com/news/palisades-fire-prompts-power-outages-tens-thousands
[15] https://news.caloes.ca.gov/governor-newsom-quickly-secures-major-disaster-declaration-from-president-biden-for-los-angeles-fires/
[16] https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2025/01/08/what-caused-palisades-fire-california-windstorm-conditions/
[17] https://www.cnbc.com/2025/01/09/los-angeles-wildfires-latest-at-least-5-dead-more-than-100000-forced-to-evacuate.html
[18] https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/c24n4pz6p2eo
[19] https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/palisades-fire
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## Palisades Fire Timeline

| | |
|---|---|
| **January 6, 2025** | • City of Malibu issues City alerts on all communication platforms (ex: social media, website alerts, Everbridge) advising the public of upcoming Particularly Dangerous Situation (PDS) Red Flag Warning (1/7/25-1/9/25) and potential Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) power outages (1/7/25-1/9/25) |
| **January 7, 2025** | • **The Palisades Fire starts at approximately 10:30am in the Santa Monica Mountains**<br>• Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) declared<br>• State of Emergency declared by Governor Newsom<br>• Evacuation orders and warnings issued<br>• City of Malibu activates the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)<br>• City of Malibu issues Emergency Alerts on Everbridge Notification System<br>• City of Malibu EOC evacuates City Hall and relocates to Westlake Village EOC<br>• Power shutoffs activate<br>• American Red Cross activates evacuation shelters |
| **January 8, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 15,832 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report 1/08))**<br>• Governor Newsom requests a major disaster declaration.<br>• City of Malibu building inspectors conduct rapid visual damage assessments<br>• Gas shutoffs activate<br>• Additional road closures implemented<br>• Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD) closed<br>• Some telecommunication providers deploy cell on wheels (COW)/generators to Malibu area |
| **January 9, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 19,978 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (1/09))**<br>• President Biden granted Governor Newsom's request for a Federal Major Disaster Declaration (DR-4856-CA), providing immediate federal assistance<br>• City of Malibu EOC evacuates Westlake Village EOC due to Kenneth Fire and relocates to Camarillo Police Department<br>• Gas stations not operational<br>• Boil water advisory issued |
| **January 10-11, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 23,654 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (1/11))**<br>• City of Malibu establishes Emergency Distribution Center at Malibu Equestrian Center providing PPE, and essential items to impacted residents |

## Palisades Fire Timeline

| | |
|---|---|
| | • City of Malibu relocates from Camarillo Police Department EOC to Pepperdine University.<br>• "Do Not Drink Water" advisory issued<br>• Urgent health order issued declaring unhealthy air quality<br>• Some telecommunications restored |
| **January 15, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 23,713 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (1/15))**<br>• **21% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report)**<br>• Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) opens |
| **January 16, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 23,713 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (1/16))**<br>• **27% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report)**<br>• Malibu EOC relocates from Pepperdine University to Malibu City Hall |
| **January 24-31, 2025** | • **Fire size estimated at 23,448 acres (Total # of acres based on final daily CalFire status update report (1/31))**<br>• **100% Containment (Based on final daily CalFire status update report on 1/31)**<br>• 4 fatalities, 720 structures destroyed in Malibu with 6,831 overall, 973 structures damaged overall<br>• City of Malibu conducts Town Hall at Malibu High School Auditorium (1/25/25)<br>• City of Malibu issues City alerts on all communication platforms (ex: social media, website alerts, Everbridge) advising the public of upcoming Flood Watch (1/27/25)<br>• City of Malibu EOC adds Recovery Team to focus on recovery efforts (1/27/25)<br>• City of Malibu coordinates with LASD to establish Pass Distribution Site (1/28/25)<br>• Ocean Water advisory issued<br>• Limited resident access begins<br>• Limited utilities restored |
| **February 3, 2025** | • **Containment at 100%**<br>• Warnings for mudslides and debris flows post wildfire<br>• 4 fatalities, 720 structures destroyed in Malibu with 6,831 overall, 973 structures damaged overall |
| **March 7, 2025** | • City of Malibu EOC deactivates |

# SECTION 3 - STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Overview

All challenges and recommendations are based on an assessment of response-related materials and in-person interviews conducted with the City and partners. Interviews were conducted during June 2025.

The City of Malibu's response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires demonstrated a strong foundation for emergency management and a deeply committed workforce. By elevating public safety and emergency management at the department level, the City enabled peer-to-peer coordination across departments and rapid problem-solving under pressure. Fire Liaison relationships with incident command, daily briefings to elected officials, and practical use of collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams, Genasys Protect, and WatchDuty helped sustain operations through fast-moving conditions and multiple EOC relocations. These strengths, culture, relationships, and adaptability—were central to Malibu's ability to safeguard the community during an extraordinarily complex event.

At the same time, the fires revealed areas where readiness must evolve to keep pace with a new reality of more frequent and higher-consequence incidents. Training and exercises have not matched the pace of repeated activations, leaving some staff uncertain about their roles in the EOC and reducing organizational "muscle memory" for managing complex operations. Governance structures were not fully formalized: the EOC Policy Group and Elected Policy Group were not consistently engaged, some executive decisions occurred outside the EOC process, and citywide crisis policies for all staff were not yet established. These gaps made it more difficult to maintain unity of command and consistent situational awareness during critical periods.

Within the EOC, core incident management practices could be improved. The incident action planning cycle was not consistently executed; documentation and the use of ICS forms varied; and on-incident purchasing lacked standardized controls, complicating disaster cost recovery. Repeated relocations of the EOC—managed with notable resourcefulness—nonetheless underscored the need for predefined readiness criteria, tested logistics checklists, technology failover, and clear expectations for when and how to return operations to Malibu.

Operational coordination benefitted from strong ties to fire agencies, but inconsistent tracking of personnel and equipment and limited, inconsistent staffing of the Situation Unit made it difficult to sustain a clear common operating picture. Communications systems absorbed significant stress as infrastructure was damaged and the EOC relocated multiple times. While LA-RICS proved resilient,

alternate-site connectivity and internal staff communications were uneven, and public-facing information was handled effectively but without the support of a County/IC Joint Information Center. Evacuation operations highlighted the following additional planning needs: detailed City procedures to guide immediate actions, stable and clearly communicated evacuation zones aligned with Genasys Protect, clarified roles beyond LASD's life-safety mission, and a formal re-entry and re-population framework**.**

Technology and support systems will be strong indicators of future readiness. Microsoft Teams, Genasys Protect, and WatchDuty provided meaningful support; however, the City's EOC management system was challenging, a dedicated GIS capability was absent, and access to SharePoint/network drives at alternate sites was inconsistent. Procurement and contracting frameworks also require maturation—both to streamline emergency purchases and to ensure FEMA/Cal OES compliance—alongside pre-negotiated agreements for lodging, vehicles, and other relocation needs. Finally, sustaining Malibu's workforce will require modernized compensation and relocation policies, transparent assignment practices, deeper staffing benches, and formalized wellness and behavioral-health supports.

Taken together, the path forward is clear and achievable: formalize governance and Citywide crisis policies; institutionalize the Planning "P," documentation, and purchasing controls; harden continuity of operations and alternate-site technology; stand up GIS and streamline EOC software system; publish comprehensive evacuation and re-entry plans; and modernize procurement and workforce policies. By codifying strengths and closing the gaps identified in this report, Malibu can convert hard-won lessons into durable resilience—readying the City for the next wildfire season and strengthening public trust in its emergency management enterprise.

# Focus Area #1: Preparedness

The City of Malibu met the challenges of both the Franklin and the Palisades fire responses with a strong organizational foundation that elevated public safety and emergency management as a departmental priority. This placement within the City's structure allowed for effective recognition of the mission's importance and supported coordination across departments at the peer level. Staff commitment, resourcefulness, and adaptability were evident throughout the incidents, forming a critical backbone of the City's response.

At the same time, the fires underscored opportunities to further strengthen Malibu's ability to manage large-scale emergencies. Additional training and exercise opportunities would help staff maintain familiarity and confidence with their EOC roles, particularly given the growing frequency of activations. Some personnel expressed a desire for greater clarity around responsibilities in the EOC, while others noted the benefit of having more formalized policies and procedures to guide all City staff during crisis events.

The absence of a pre-disaster recovery plan meant that recovery priorities were developed during the incident, and limited City Hall evacuation planning required EOC staff to adapt quickly when relocating to alternate facilities. While staff responded effectively, future efforts could be supported by establishing formal agreements, pre-identified logistical arrangements, and readily available electronic guides. Similarly, coordination with partners, such as the American Red Cross, would be strengthened by developing a mass care strategy, and volunteer and donations management could benefit from additional planning.

Overall, Malibu demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and commitment during the Franklin and Palisades fires. By expanding preparedness efforts — including enhanced training, policy development, continuity planning, and human services support — the City can build on its organizational strengths to further enhance readiness and resilience.

## Focus Area #1 Strengths

- The organizational placement of the public safety program as a department reporting directly to the City Manager best ensures effective and efficient access to all City departments and external agencies and allows for greater prioritization to be provided to Citywide preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.
- City staff worked well together and performed extremely complex tasks during the response to both fires.
- The City fostered and maintained a positive working relationship and effective coordination capabilities with Los Angeles County and neighboring jurisdictions which better enabled support to affected populations.

- The City has an established Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and other documents that helped guide the response efforts.
- The City was able to relocate their EOC multiple times while continuing response operations.
- Most of the City staff were familiar with response operations and knew they had a role to perform during both emergencies.

# Focus Area #1 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Frequency of Emergency Response Training & Exercises

**Discussion:** Staff commitment was immeasurable during the response. However, staff turnover and increasing job demands limited employees' ability to participate in regular training, contributing to some uncertainty regarding EOC roles. Although the Public Safety Department offered several training opportunities prior to the fires, City staff participation was limited. Both fires illustrated a lack of sufficient EOC training and experience by some City staff. The last exercise the City conducted prior to the fires was in December 2023. It is difficult to remember what to do during an incident if you haven't regularly practiced your role and responsibilities within the EOC. Additionally, during the response efforts, staff filled multiple different roles within the EOC, and they were not trained ahead of time to fulfill those roles. While the Public Safety Department does provide training throughout the year, it is difficult for all staff to participate in the scheduled training courses due to high workload and limited department staffing. During both fires, this caused a lot of ad hoc procedures and just-in-time training for EOC staff.

*References:* City's Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Staffing Plan, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 1.1: Implement a more frequent and structured training and exercise schedule that accommodates frequent activations while reinforcing role familiarity.** This may include shorter, scenario-based drills, just-in-time training modules, and post-activation refreshers designed to maintain operational readiness even during periods of high activity.

## Challenge #2 – Citywide Emergency Policy for Staff

**Discussion:** City staff adapted quickly during the incident, though the absence of consistent policies or procedures for all employees created uncertainty during response operations. For example, some staff worked 12 plus hour days onsite at the EOC, while other staff worked from home or were not activated. Additionally, some staff had two plus-hour commutes each way during the response without additional compensation or consideration for the additional time they spent before and after an EOC shift. City staff also had a difficult time getting past checkpoints being operated by L.A. County.

*Reference:* City's Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Org Chart, EOC Staffing Plan, EOC Shift Emails, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 1.2: Develop and adopt a Citywide emergency response policy applicable to all staff, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations during emergencies.** Embedding this policy in orientation and refresher training will help build confidence and ensure consistent action across the organization. Additionally, providing pre-established badging that is coordinated with LA County to all City staff is critical prior to an emergency.

## Challenge #3 – Recovery Planning

**Discussion:** Staff resourcefulness enabled recovery priorities to be developed in real time; however, the lack of a pre-established recovery plan required ad hoc decision-making. The establishment of the Local Assistance Center following the Franklin Fire and a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) for the Palisades Fire was a major success for the City; however, the absence of prepositioned resources and timely staffing requests placed significant strain on an already exhausted workforce. Staff were put in a difficult position—without initial guidance, plans, or procedures to reference, they were unable to provide answers or operate effectively in the early stages.

*References:* Disaster Recovery Center Action Plan and Local Assistance Documents

**Recommendation 1.3: Develop and adopt a comprehensive disaster recovery plan that provides a structured framework for operations, including prioritization of services, coordination with external partners, and financial and administrative recovery considerations.** Exercising the plan will further strengthen the City's capacity for post-incident recovery.

## Challenge #4 – EOC Continuity & Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

**Discussion:** EOC personnel successfully maintained continuity of operations through multiple relocations; however, the lack of formal procedures and agreements made each transition significantly more challenging. Staff were often required to move the EOC during hazardous conditions, at times traveling directly through heavy smoke or active fires. Although they performed exceptionally well during every move, the relocations were unplanned and staff had to operate in dangerous circumstances without clear guidance on what to bring, when to move, or where to report for their next shift.

*References:* EOC Org Chart, Malibu EOC Status Board, and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 1.4: Establish continuity procedures, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), and logistical agreements for alternate or mobile EOC facilities.** Document these in accessible electronic guides and test them during exercises to ensure staff are familiar with the process. This will reduce friction during relocations and ensure seamless continuity of operations.

## Challenge #5 – Volunteer & Donations Management

**Discussion:** Community support was evident, but limited planning for volunteer and donations management placed additional burdens on staff during the response. On several occasions, the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) was staffed with personnel reassigned by leadership. While this approach was adequate for short-term recovery efforts, the DRC requires an operational framework that can sustain longer-term operations. Staff cannot be expected to carry out their regular duties while simultaneously supporting the DRC and broader recovery activities. Additionally, a formal recovery structure must be established prior to an emergency, and staff should have the necessary forms and documentation readily available immediately following the response.

The use of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), Sheriff's Department Volunteers on Patrol (VOP), and Fire Department Community Brigade volunteers provided critical "boots on the ground" information during and after the fires. These volunteers assisted with evacuations and helped distribute Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during repopulation. These volunteers were also critical in providing situational awareness to the EOC during the response efforts. Without this volunteer coordination, the EOC would not have had situational awareness and knowledge of what their partners were doing in the field.

The City established an Emergency Distribution Center at the Malibu Equestrian Center and was operated by City staff and the Malibu CERT team. The Distribution Center provided masks, food, water, and first aid supplies to any impacted residents.

*Reference:* EOC Donation Forms, Recovery Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 1.5: Develop and integrate volunteer and donations management planning into the City's emergency operations framework.** Explore establishing an MOU with local nonprofits to assist with donation management. Train staff to support these functions during crises and exercise coordination with partner organizations to ensure the City can effectively channel community support when it is most needed.

# Focus Area #2: EOC & Incident Management

The Franklin and Palisades fires placed extraordinary demands on Malibu's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Despite leadership transitions, repeated relocations, and direct threats to the facility itself, EOC personnel remained committed to sustaining operations and supporting the community. Assistance from surrounding jurisdictions and mutual aid programs further enhanced the City's ability to manage the complex and prolonged incidents.

The response efforts also revealed opportunities to strengthen adherence to EOC processes and ensure consistent integration of leadership into incident management structures. On some occasions, executive decisions occurred outside the EOC process, which limited situational awareness and reduced the opportunity for the emergency management team to inform decision-making. Establishing a formal policy group and reinforcing structured management protocols would help further align executive leadership with EOC operations.

The incident action planning cycle was not always consistently applied, which reduced the overall effectiveness of situational awareness and coordination. The absence of a dedicated Documentation Unit and inconsistent use of Incident Command System (ICS213) forms made resource tracking and internal communication more challenging. Similarly, purchases of consumable and non-consumable items were not always systematically tracked, creating difficulties in meeting disaster cost recovery documentation requirements.

EOC continuity posed a particularly significant challenge, as Malibu's EOC sits within a known fire corridor and has required evacuation during the last three major wildfires. During the Franklin and Palisades Fires, EOC staff were required to evacuate and relocate while simultaneously managing community evacuations, which strained logistics, staff role execution, and continuity of operations. These recurring vulnerabilities underscore the need for both formal relocation procedures and the establishment of alternate EOC facilities outside high-risk areas. The absence of a mobile command trailer further limited Malibu's options, forcing staff to rely solely on fixed facilities and ad hoc arrangements during relocations.

Overall, the City demonstrated adaptability and resilience throughout these challenges. By strengthening EOC processes, improving documentation and cost tracking, and establishing robust continuity resources, including alternate EOC facilities, relocation procedures, and mobile command capacity, Malibu can enhance readiness for complex and extended activations.

# Focus Area #2 Strengths

- Elected Officials were actively integrated within the community and offered executive oversight and touchpoints for all fire-impacted areas.
- City leadership collaborated daily with elected officials and maintained consistent communication throughout the response efforts. EOC staff accomplished multiple EOC relocations during response efforts.
- City staff and volunteers coordinated with the onsite incident command structure daily.
- EOC staff followed most Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) practices.
- City staff were very dedicated to response efforts and trying to follow EOC procedures.

# Focus Area #2 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – City Leadership Alignment

**Discussion:** Leadership engagement and commitment to community support were evident throughout the response; however, opportunities remain to strengthen alignment by ensuring that all executive-level decisions are fully coordinated through the EOC process.

During the response, the City did not utilize a formal EOC Policy Group structure. The City Management Team (defined as the City Manager, Assistant City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Department Heads, and the City Clerk) did not convene as the EOC Policy Group when the EOC was activated. Upon EOC activation, the EOC Policy Group is typically convened in or near the EOC to ensure efficient coordination and timely executive-level policy decisions. Formal activation of the EOC Policy Group would allow the City Management Team to maintain continuity of normal City functions while supporting response operations effectively. The best practice is for the City Management Team, when functioning as the EOC Policy Group, to focus on strategic direction, policy development, and long-term considerations, rather than operational decision-making. During the response efforts to the fires, some decisions were made on an ad hoc basis with selected City Management Team members rather than through a coordinated EOC Policy Group process.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 2.1: Establish a formal EOC Policy Group composed of the City Management Team to provide strategic guidance and executive-level decision-making during major incidents.** Clearly define the group's role within the City's emergency management structure to ensure that all leadership decisions are coordinated through the EOC. This alignment will enhance situational awareness, allow the emergency management team to provide timely analysis and recommendations, and ensure that executive actions are fully integrated into operational planning and response activities. Regular participation of the EOC policy group in EOC processes (such as briefings, incident action planning, and

resource prioritization) will reinforce a unified command approach and support consistent communication across all levels of the organization.

## Challenge #2 – Incident Planning

**Discussion:** Staff collaborated to share information and adapt plans under evolving conditions but faced challenges when the planning process was applied inconsistently, limiting a common operating picture.

Incident Action Plans (IAPs) or EOC Action Plans were not produced cohesively and consistently during the response efforts. Each shift should produce an EOC Action Plan and follow the Planning P process throughout the shift to ensure continuity and consistency in EOC process. During the Franklin and Palisades Fires, EOC Action Plans were inconsistent. White boards were utilized for situation status, but the information was not translated onto the appropriate planning documents to ensure the next EOC shift had the same situational awareness. Relocating the EOC also posed a challenge to maintaining the white boards and overall situational awareness.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 2.2: Institutionalize the planning process by making it a routine element of all EOC activations, regardless of scale or duration.** This includes establishing a standardized schedule for planning meetings, clearly assigning roles for developing situation reports and EOC Action Plans components, and ensuring products are distributed consistently to staff and leadership. Even during smaller incidents, applying the planning cycle builds staff familiarity, reinforces discipline in information-sharing, and creates a habit of documenting objectives, strategies, and resource needs. Regular use of EOC Action Plans will strengthen situational awareness, support operational coordination across departments, and provide a record that can be used for both cost recovery and post-incident analysis.

## Challenge #3 – Documentation and Cost Recovery

**Discussion:** Staff showed resourcefulness in tracking expenses and purchases under pressure but could enhance the effectiveness of resource tracking and use of ICS 213RRs were not always consistent, creating challenges for reimbursement. Several ICS 213RRs were utilized during the response efforts, however, they were not accurately completed and finalized. Overall, the administrative procedures (214s, check-in-check-out procedures, sign-in sheets, etc.) were not followed cohesively for each EOC shift throughout the response efforts.

Additionally, the inconsistent use of ICS forms, and the absence of any City-specific customized versions, created challenges. For example, not having an ICS 207 or a shift-specific organizational chart led to confusion in each operational period, particularly as staff rotated through different roles within the EOC.

Key stakeholders identified challenges in efficient and effective tracking of resources as resource management took on a largely decentralized approach. Information provided in resource requests often lacked sufficient detail to properly support requests and understand needs. The EOC software system that the City was using at the time was found to be problematic as some staff had limited exposure to the system and struggled with basic maneuvering around the platform. As a result, staff developed alternative methods of resource ordering and tracking including paper-based forms and individual emails making record keeping more challenging.

Resources were identified to often be requested through individual emails and phone calls, creating a difficult data collection exercise and backfilling ICS forms. To ensure comprehensive documentation is collected to promote an effective resource management process and to best prepare for potential federal audits, the documentation must be collected in a singular location. Tracking down individual emails and phone calls not only adds to the level of effort required but also presents the potential documentation that will not be discovered justifying a specific resource expenditure.

As the Resource Unit leader resides in the Logistics Section in the Malibu EOC, the communication of resource status was not routinely available or incorporated in EOC incident action planning. The limitation of resources information in incident action planning challenges the ability to make informed decisions during response operations. Throughout this incident staffing the Situation Unit experienced difficulties creating added challenges in comprehensive action planning including the incorporation of resource status.

The use of EMMA during the response efforts greatly enhanced the financial and administrative tracking process and led to financial and administrative documentation that may not have occurred otherwise.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, ICS 213RRs, ICS 214s, and other EOC Finance Section Documents

**Recommendation 2.3: Dedicate trained staff for Finance and Administration Section functions within the EOC to ensure that financial tracking, purchasing, and documentation are prioritized from the start of an incident**. Establishing standardized documentation practices—such as consistent use of ICS 213 forms, purchase logs, and electronic filing systems—will create a clear audit trail that supports both operational decision-making and disaster cost recovery requirements. Having staff focused on these functions not only reduces the burden on operational responders but also ensures the City is well-positioned to meet FEMA and Cal OES reimbursement standards. This approach will help capture eligible costs in real time, minimize the risk of missed documentation, and streamline the recovery process after future incidents.

## Challenge #4 – EOC Continuity and Relocation

**Discussion:** The City's primary Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has required evacuation during each of the last three major wildfire incidents due to its location within a fire corridor, significantly

undermining continuity of operations. During these incidents, the City relied on strong relationships with neighboring jurisdictions and the ingenuity of City staff and volunteers to rapidly identify alternate facilities. While these efforts enabled continued operations, the relocations were largely ad hoc. Facilities were not pre-identified, often lacked adequate space, technology, power, or logistical support, and were not configured to support sustained EOC operations. The City cannot assume such facilities will be available in future incidents, particularly when neighboring jurisdictions may also be responding to emergencies. Additionally, these relocations likely disrupted the host jurisdictions' own operations.

During the Palisades Fire, repeated EOC relocations further strained personnel, technology, and logistics. Relocations occurred under hazardous conditions, without formal checklists, protocols, or documentation to guide the safe and effective movement of EOC operations. This placed staff at risk and caused significant disruptions to emergency coordination for extended periods. Compounding these challenges, pressure to prematurely re-occupy the primary EOC complicated operational decision-making.

These conditions demonstrate an ongoing and foreseeable need to relocate EOC operations during major incidents. Reliance on a limited number of informal alternate sites presents additional risks, including site unavailability, evolving threats, insufficient capacity, or competing emergency demands. To maintain effective emergency operations, the City must establish a comprehensive, pre-incident framework for EOC continuity and relocation, including formal agreements, clearly defined processes, and regularly tested alternate facilities.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 2.4: Develop formal EOC relocation protocols that clearly define roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, readiness criteria, and step-by-step procedures for relocating operations.** This should include logistical requirements, technology needs, safety considerations, and resource tracking. Identify, catalog, and assess potential alternate sites through a pre-incident inventory, needs and gaps analysis, and facility readiness assessments. This includes establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with partner agencies and neighboring jurisdictions to secure alternate EOC facilities outside fire-prone area and identifying multiple viable options to account for competing emergency needs. Test these facilities in advance to ensure viability of operations. Incorporate EOC relocation drills into training and exercises and establish clear re-entry criteria that are communicated to City leadership and elected officials to manage expectations and reduce pressure for premature return to the primary EOC.

## Challenge #5 – Mobile Command

**Discussion:** Malibu lacks flexible backup/alternate facilities if the primary EOC is compromised and partner MOUs are delayed or unavailable. During both fire responses, the EOC had to relocate without a

plan or appropriate resources. In addition, the City does not have a mobile resource to deploy to the Incident Command Post (ICP) to support staff that are at the ICP.

A mobile command center would provide Malibu with a critical, flexible hub for coordinated response and recovery. By bringing communications, planning, and operational capabilities directly into the impacted areas, it would reduce reliance on outside agencies and allow City leaders to maintain real-time situational awareness. The unit could serve as an on-scene location for interagency coordination, resource tracking, community information, and public officials' briefings, helping streamline decision-making during fast-moving fire conditions. Additionally, a mobile command center would support continuity of government functions and offer a visible, accessible presence for residents seeking assistance in the aftermath of major fire events.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, Logistics Files, and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 2.5: Explore acquisition or lease of a mobile command trailer to provide a deployable, scalable option for sustaining EOC functions or supporting staff at the ICP.** A mobile platform would enhance flexibility, allow operations closer to the incident when safe, and ensure Malibu has a dedicated continuity resource independent of outside partners.

# Focus Area #3: Governance & Policy

The Palisades Fire underscored the central role of Malibu's elected and executive leadership in shaping the City's response. Leadership was engaged and demonstrated commitment to the safety of the community, but the absence of formalized structures for governance during disasters created challenges for coordination, decision-making, and integration with emergency management processes.

During the incident, elected officials were not consistently incorporated into the EOC structure through a defined elected policy group. Without this mechanism, opportunities for leadership to provide strategic guidance while maintaining situational awareness were limited. At times, executive decisions were made outside of the EOC process, which reduced information flow and hindered the ability of the emergency management team to provide critical input.

In addition, leadership placed strong pressure on EOC staff to return operations to Malibu before it was logistically feasible, creating stress and complicating continuity of operations. The event also revealed that broader policies to guide all City staff during crisis events were underdeveloped, leading to uncertainty about expectations and responsibilities outside of the EOC environment.

Together, these challenges illustrate that Malibu would benefit from codifying the role of elected and executive leaders in emergency response, strengthening governance structures, and ensuring that policies are in place to guide both leadership and staff during large-scale incidents.

## Focus Area #3 Strengths

- The City held public forums to gather feedback from the community on response efforts.
- City leadership was very engaged and proactive during the fire response efforts.
- EOC staff remained flexible and overcame significant operational challenges.

## Focus Area #3 Challenges & Recommendations

### Challenge #1 – Elected Officials Integration

**Discussion:** Elected officials demonstrated strong engagement and commitment during the incident but lacked a formal mechanism to participate effectively in the response structure. Elected officials serve in a legislative role, providing governance oversight and policy approval, and are not intended to participate in response operations or tactical decision-making.

Throughout the response, coordination between the EOC Policy Group (city management team) and the Elected Policy Group (elected officials) was largely informal. Elected officials communicated directly with City staff and department leadership on an ad hoc basis, which at times created confusion in decision-making and resulted in elected officials becoming involved in operational details. Additionally,

multiple City Council members were present at incident briefings and field operations sites. This presence created the potential for operational confusion by blurring the distinction between field-level priorities and the strategic policy decisions that should be addressed through the EOC.

During future response efforts, the City Council should remain focused on approving emergency proclamations, providing policy direction, ensuring government continuity, liaising with state/federal officials, managing public communication (via Mayor/PIO), and overseeing critical recovery decisions, focusing on policy while trusting operational staff to handle the "weeds" of the response itself, ensuring the community needs are met. The EOC Policy Group can guide the Elected Policy Group to review and make strategic policy decisions. This would further help to keep the elected officials out of the details of response operations, allowing them to focus on the high priority policies and decisions needed to run the City.

*Reference:* City Council Agendas, EOC Action Plans, and EOC Documentation

**Recommendation 3.1: Develop a clear, documented process in emergency plans that defines how and when the Elected Policy Group should be involved during emergencies.** Train elected officials on the EOC's roles and functions and incorporating them into exercises to ensure familiarity. This will give elected officials a structured role in incident management while preserving EOC processes and improving coordination.

## Challenge #2 – Executive Decision-Making

**Discussion:** While elected officials demonstrated tremendous dedication and support to response actions, it was observed that these efforts can be enhanced through establishing formal guidance. Harnessing the collective efforts of leadership in an organized manner to enhance situation awareness through established networks, ensuring a continuity of leadership, leading policy development, and demonstrating a unified direction better enables the response team to successfully engage in incident management operations. Elected officials have a unique role in an emergency and in information-sharing due to their emergency authority and how they hold a special relationship with constituents and stakeholder organizations.

*Reference:* City Council Agendas, EOC Action Plans, and EOC Documentation

**Recommendation 3.2: Establish procedures that ensure coordination and communication between the EOC Policy Group and the Elected Policy Group to better support EOC operations.** All major decisions should flow through the EOC process, supported by regular management briefings that allow both the EOC Policy Group and Elected Policy Group to stay fully informed and provide input in real time. Embedding this practice will enhance situational awareness, reinforce a unified chain of command, and strengthen decision-making.

## Challenge #3 – Leadership Expectations During Relocation

**Discussion:** EOC personnel adapted to multiple relocations, maintaining continuity of operations; however, pressure to return to Malibu before conditions were ready created additional stress and complexity.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, EOC Documentation, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 3.3: Establish clear emergency readiness benchmarks—such as EOC facility safety, infrastructure availability/access (such as roadways being open), and staffing support for EOC relocation and re-entry operations.** Communicate these benchmarks to leadership in advance to help manage expectations, reduce pressure during activations, and ensure re-entry decisions are based on objective criteria.

# Focus Area #4: Operational Coordination

The Franklin and Palisades fires highlighted the importance of coordination between the City of Malibu and its many response partners. The City benefited from strong relationships with fire agencies, supported in part by the presence of dedicated fire liaisons. These liaisons provided valuable situational intelligence, promoted effective communication, and strengthened collaboration with incident command. Staff also made effective use of tools such as Microsoft Teams, open video calls, and whiteboards to promote information-sharing and coordination during periods of high activity, including EOC evacuation and relocation.

At the same time, the incident underscored areas where operational coordination could be further strengthened. Resource tracking processes for equipment and personnel were inconsistent, limiting the City's ability to maintain a complete picture of assets deployed. The EOC Situation Unit, which is critical for developing a common operating picture, struggled with maintaining trained and consistent staffing, impacting decision-making and situational awareness.

Staff dedication was evident, but the assignment of personnel to multiple roles — sometimes outside their trained specialty — reduced role confidence and made specialized skills difficult to sustain. The transition to Microsoft Teams ultimately improved collaboration and ease of use but required significant back-end adjustments to align files and workflows. Coordination with the Disaster Management Area (B) also faced challenges when the assigned coordinator was personally impacted by the fire, forcing alternate coordination routes and highlighting the importance of familiarity with mutual aid systems such as California's Emergency Management Mutual Aid (EMMA) program.

Given Malibu's unique geography — coastal terrain, the Pacific Coast Highway, and the Santa Monica Mountains — interorganizational and interjurisdictional coordination will always be a defining element of response operations. By building on the strengths of fire liaison support, technology integration, and agency relationships, while addressing gaps in resource tracking, situational awareness, and staff role alignment, the City can strengthen its operational coordination for future incidents.

## Focus Area #4 Strengths

- The use of the Fire Liaisons was a massive success during response efforts.
- City staff were creative and used multiple tools to coordinate response efforts.
- City staff, specifically the Fire Liaisons, used existing relationships to coordinate during response and recovery operations, which enhanced situational awareness and cohesive decision-making.
- The use of Microsoft Teams later in response operations allowed for better tracking and enhanced coordination.

# Focus Area #4 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Fire Liaison Integration

**Discussion:** Fire Liaisons provided valuable intelligence, facilitated communication, and strengthened interagency coordination, serving as a critical link with incident command. Fire Liaisons are City staff who, during fire response operations, were deployed to the field to provide updates to the Incident Command Post (ICP) and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The Fire Liaisons provided a coordination point between the ICP and the EOC that would not have existed without their role.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.1: Maintain and expand the role of Fire Liaisons in emergency operations by clearly defining their responsibilities in plans and incorporating them into training and exercises.** Preserving these strong ties with incident command will ensure timely intelligence sharing, reinforce interagency relationships, and improve the City's ability to adapt during dynamic wildfire events.

## Challenge #2 – Resource Tracking

**Discussion:** Staff made resourceful efforts to track equipment and personnel, but inconsistent processes limited visibility of available assets and their deployment. The City's EOC software system that was used at the beginning of response operations was both helpful and problematic. The system was difficult to use and not many EOC staff were sufficiently trained in how to use it. The move to Microsoft Teams helped with resource tracking later in the Palisades Fire. Key stakeholders (Logistics and Finance Section) identified challenges in efficient and effective tracking of resources as resource management took on a largely decentralized approach. Information provided in resource requests often lacked sufficient detail to properly support requests and understand needs. ICS 213RR forms were not used at the beginning of response operations, which made resource tracking very cumbersome.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, Logistics and Finance Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.2: Standardize a unified resource tracking process and train staff on its consistent application across all incidents**. Integrating this process into EOC procedures and technology platforms will provide leadership with real-time asset visibility, support more effective deployment, and improve accountability for cost recovery.

## Challenge #3 – Situation Unit Personnel

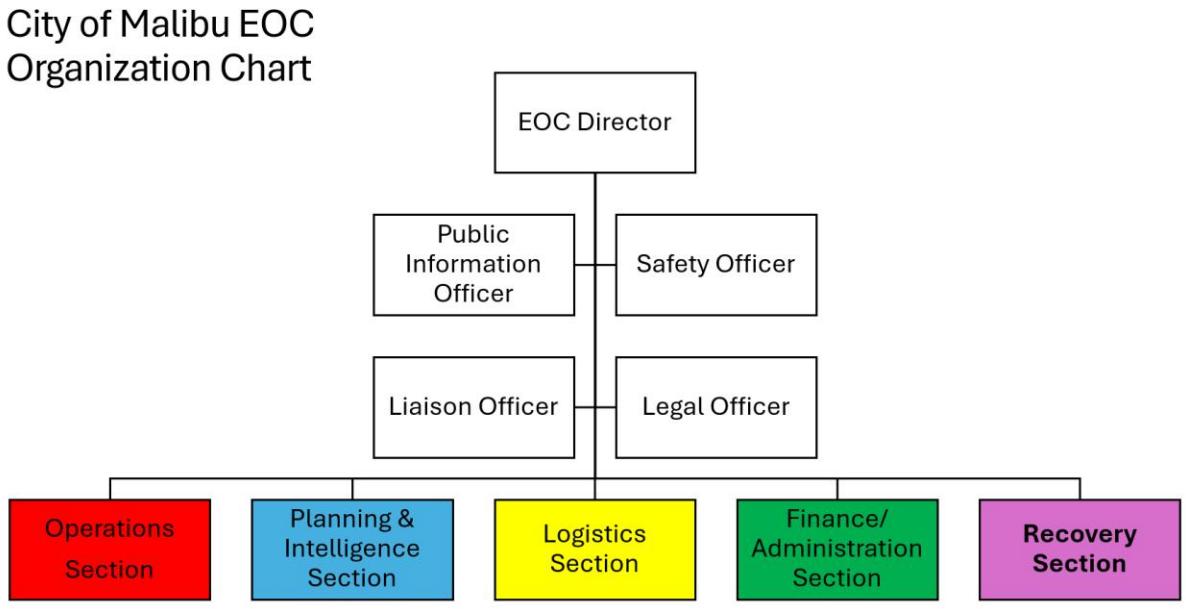
**Discussion:** The Situation Unit contributed to information gathering, but the lack of consistently trained personnel reduced situational awareness and limited decision-making support. Interviews highlighted a

communication gap that existed in the EOC that restricted information sharing between field operations, EOC sections, and the Situation Status Unit. The connection between these response functions is important to maintain a cohesive dialog and Common Operating Picture (COP). Each function benefits from the information managed by the other. The breakdown in this situation appears to be more from a change in operational rhythm and a lack of training versus a deliberate withholding of information. Job aids reminding personnel to coordinate with key personnel in the EOC with specific coordination tasks help to facilitate the ongoing communication.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, Planning Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.3: Develop a trained pool of Planning Section staff to serve in the Situation Unit, with clear responsibilities for maintaining situational displays, maps, and updates.** Emphasize this function in exercises to reinforce its importance in building a common operating picture, supporting both tactical and policy-level decisions.

## Challenge #4 – Staff Role Assignments




**Discussion:** City staff demonstrated adaptability by filling multiple roles during the incident, though frequent reassignment to unfamiliar positions impacted confidence and limited application of specialized skills. Personnel were placed in different EOC roles across shifts due to variations in how staffing assignments were made, leading to some individuals serving in roles outside their original EOC designation and/or expertise. Throughout both response efforts, some personnel were moved from

position to position, making it difficult to maintain continuity of operations and placing significant stress on individuals who were asked to fill roles they had neither trained for nor previously been expected to perform.

Another challenge was the use of consultants to augment EOC staffing. Conceptually, this is a great concept, but the practical reality is often very different. During the response efforts, the City chose to utilize this type of assistance, which overwhelmed EOC staff when they were asked to perform tasks they were not trained to do or they were asked questions to help the consultant perform tasks, which ended up taking them away from operational priorities.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Staffing Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.4: Align staff assignments more closely with training and experience while expanding cross-training to provide flexibility for surge staffing.** Reinforce role-specific readiness through regular exercises so staff can step confidently into primary or secondary positions when needed.

## Challenge #5 – Technology & Collaboration Tools

**Discussion:** Microsoft Teams and physical whiteboards proved highly valuable for collaboration, though significant backend set-up was required during the event to make these tools fully functional. The transition from the City's EOC software system to Microsoft Teams proved beneficial for the EOC. However, establishing the Microsoft Teams channels and organizational structure, assigning appropriate permissions and access for staff, providing access to external partners (such as EMMA support), and managing virtual EOC operations introduced significant challenges during the response.

During the later stages of the response, IT staff created (or provided access to) a SharePoint site for mutual aid partners. While this proved to be a valuable tool for incoming assistance, the level of effort required for IT to customize and configure the site was significant. This capability should be pre-planned, with a "dark site" or alternative file-sharing solution ready for activation in future emergencies.

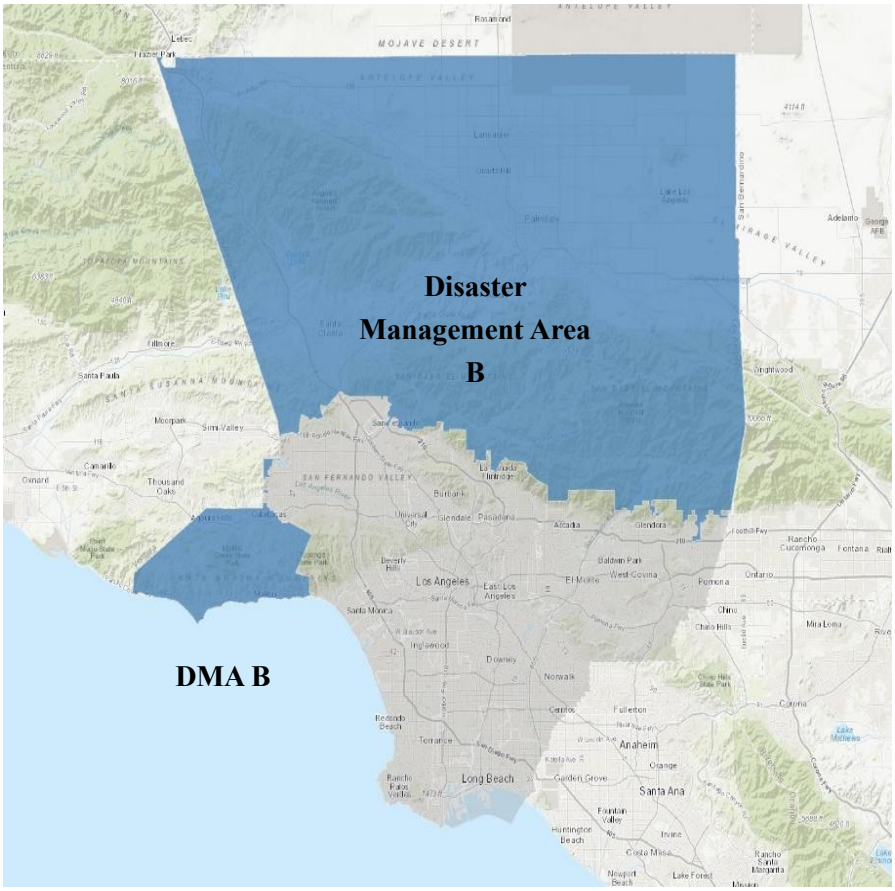
As response operations progressed, the City relied on several different Excel files to support collaboration and manage activities. While this was functional as a short-term solution, forms and other documentation should be standardized and developed in advance of an emergency. If the City plans to standardize using Microsoft Teams channels, these forms and documents should be located within each channel to assist EOC staff.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.5: Configure Microsoft Teams channels, sync key files, and establish standardized digital workflows prior to activation.** Documenting these procedures and exercising them regularly will allow staff to maximize efficiency and reduce setup delays during future incidents.

## Challenge #6 – Regional Coordination

**Discussion:** Los Angeles County serves as the intermediate level of government that coordinates and communicates disaster response needs between the eighty-eight (88) cities within its geographic boundaries and the State of California[21]. The County is organized into eight Disaster Management Areas (A through H), with each city assigned to a specific area. A Disaster Management Area Coordinator (DMAC) oversees each Disaster Management Area. The City of Malibu is located within Disaster Management Area B.




Regional coordination was essential during the incident; however, challenges were identified when Area B communication was limited due to incident impacts. As a result, the City coordinated directly with the Operational Area Duty Officer.

[21] Data. Lacounty.gov/datasets/lacounty::disaster-management-areas.about.

One of the main EOC Operations Section objectives during the Palisades Fire was to "Maintain Routine Communications with LASD (Watch Commander), LAFD, Public Works, and Field Personnel for Updates on Fire Progression, Road Closures/Opening, press briefings, access for community partners/City staff, and other pertinent event information (as needed)." This was challenging due to a lack of operational communication equipment and the limited availability of external/regional liaisons. Collaboration with outside agencies relied largely on personal relationships, website updates, and eventually the IMT Cooperators Meeting. This will likely continue to be a challenge for the City's EOC, given that most first-response functions (sheriff, fire, EMS, etc.) are contracted out.

The ability for a Fire liaison representative to attend the IMT Cooperators Meetings greatly enhanced the City's ability to respond and recover. However, this was an ad hoc process and needs to be formalized for future emergencies.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 4.6: Expand staff training and familiarity with regional coordination systems and partners.** This includes training on the Disaster Management Areas process and role so that staff are aware of who manages it and how it works. Additional measures include developing redundant pathways for communication with regional partners to ensure coordination can continue seamlessly, even when key individuals or systems are unavailable.

## Challenge #7 – Geographic Coordination

**Discussion:** Malibu's unique coastal and mountainous geography requires extensive interagency and interjurisdictional coordination, which was evident during the fire response. The City faced major communication challenges (such as disruptions to radio and cell networks) as well as logistical issues, including staff access back into the City, EOC relocation, network connectivity, and resource distribution during both response efforts. These difficulties were compounded by the geographic characteristics of the City and its surrounding area. For example, the City was gathering weather data from the Topanga weather station, which was in the valley and not accurate for most of the geographic locations within the City. Since the geography will not change, the City should continue to expand their coordination efforts and enhance joint planning, training, and exercises initiatives with surrounding jurisdictions.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Planning Section Documents

**Recommendation 4.7: Continue to prioritize regional planning and joint exercises with agencies responsible for coastal, mountain, and highway operations.** This will strengthen shared understanding of jurisdictional roles, clarify coordination procedures, and enhance the City's ability to manage geographically complex incidents.

## Challenge #8 –EOC Staff Augmentation

**Discussion:** During both fire incidents, the City did not have sufficient staffing to effectively support EOC operations given the complexity and duration of the response. The City utilized consultants to augment EOC staff, which was a creative solution. However, the consultants had not trained or exercised with the City EOC staff, and it led to several complications for the existing City EOC staff.

Although the City utilized the Emergency Management Mutual Aid (EMMA) to supplement EOC staffing, the support arrived later in the response, making it difficult to effectively integrate EMMA personnel into the established EOC operational cadence. EMMA was developed to provide emergency management personnel and technical specialists to support the disaster operations of affected jurisdictions during an emergency to assist with response and recovery for the whole community without imposing additional financial burden on the impacted jurisdiction[22]. EMMA is administered by the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), with an EMMA Coordinator assigned at each level of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). In future incidents, the City may want to consider coordinating ahead of time with its designated EMMA Coordinator (otherwise known as the Cal OES Regional Duty Officer) to request additional resources, staffing support, and to work out logistics and Mutual Aid Agreements (MAAs) ahead of time.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Planning Section Documents

**Recommendation 4.8: Augment EOC staffing capacity by establishing pre-incident agreements/MAAs with qualified external consultants and within the EMMA system to support critical roles during major EOC activations.** This approach should include the proactive activation of EMMA as soon as an incident is anticipated to be significant in size or scope, ensuring timely staffing support across EOC Sections.

As an additional preparedness measure, contracted personnel should be integrated into the City's EOC program through regular training, orientation to City-specific plans and systems, and participation in exercises to ensure operational readiness and seamless coordination during future incidents**.**

[22] State of California Emergency Management Mutual Aid Plan.

# Focus Area #5: Communication

The Palisades Fire placed unprecedented strain on the City of Malibu's communication systems. Public Safety Power Shut-Offs along with infrastructure damage caused widespread system failures, creating challenges for both internal and external communication. While the Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communication System (LA-RICS) demonstrated resilience and remained functional during the incident, many of the City's own systems struggled to support operations and situational awareness.

The City's relocation to alternate EOCs further complicated communications, as connectivity and logistical issues limited staff ability to collaborate. Internet connectivity was often unreliable, particularly during transitions between facilities. City staff also noted the absence of a consistent plan for staff communications during emergencies, leading to varied experiences — some personnel received emails while others did not — which fueled confusion, misinformation, and rumors.

Power and telecommunications outages created an even greater barrier, at times making it impossible to send alerts, warnings, and real-time updates to the community. These failures underscored Malibu's vulnerability to cascading impacts when critical infrastructure is disrupted.

Externally, the City had social media channels and a website available to share information with the public but lacked the staffing and dedicated resources to manage these platforms effectively during a sustained incident. While channels were in place, a dedicated incident-specific webpage was not established, limiting centralized access to updates.

During an evacuation, Malibu's primary responsibility is issuing alerts to its residents. Evacuation decisions are made and enforced by LASD. When Incident Command broke down the existing evacuation zones into sub-zones and transmitted updated alerts without coordinating with the City, it created conflicting information for residents and placed additional strain on Malibu's EOC to correct and clarify messaging.

Despite these challenges, Malibu staff worked diligently to maintain communications under difficult circumstances, leveraging available platforms and partner support. Building on these experiences, the City has clear opportunities to strengthen resilience, improve internal and external communications, and reduce reliance on ad hoc solutions in future incidents.

## Focus Area #5 Strengths

- The use of LA-RICS radios provided a mechanism for the EOC to communicate with field personnel, the ICP and the Mayor.
- The City website was a critical communication tool.
- The City found innovative ways to communicate (such as internal Everbridge notifications).
- Providing EOC laptops for mutual aid partners working in the EOC proved to be very helpful.

# Focus Area #5 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Systemwide Communications Loss

**Discussion:** Staff adapted resourcefully to maintain operations despite the destruction of key infrastructure that created systemwide communications challenges. During initial response efforts, all forms of communication were down (phones, internet, some radios, etc.) due to the high winds and Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS).

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Palisades Cooperations Meeting Notes, other Operations and Logistics Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 5.1: Expand use of resilient systems such as LA-RICS and mobile communication options, pursue additional redundancies, and ensure alternate EOCs are equipped with a reliable communication infrastructure.** Building multiple layers of back-up capacity will reduce vulnerability to infrastructure loss and safeguard continuity of operations in future large-scale incidents.

## Challenge #2 – Alternate EOC Communication

**Discussion:** EOC staff-maintained operations at alternate facilities, but logistical and connectivity barriers created delays and required staff to improvise solutions. In essence, each time the EOC relocated, the staff was relying upon existing communication and other equipment that was located at the alternate location. Often, this was non-existent or had significant connectivity issues.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 5.2: Establish and test alternate EOC sites for communications readiness, including internet connectivity, phone systems, and collaboration tools.** Documenting site capabilities and limitations in advance will streamline future relocations and ensure continuity of communication systems.

## Challenge #3 – Staff Communication

**Discussion:** Timely and consistent communications are fundamental to effective incident management, coordination, team cohesion, and staff moral. Clear and accurate information from trusted sources is crucial during incidents for informed decision-making, overall safety, operational effectiveness, and community actions.

City staff remained committed during the incident, yet inconsistent email distribution created confusion and, at times, fueled rumors. During the interviews, it was reported that timely and accurate information was lacking during response operations. When communication was provided, it was often sent by email (via the PIG distribution) which is an unreliable method during an emergency. Some staff received no messages

or updates at all during either incident. Human Resources did not have an up-to-date address list or visibility of the geographic location of staff, which affected shift scheduling and travel times. Outdated or inaccurate contact lists further contributed to delays and information gaps for City personnel.

Additionally, the lack of the use of standardized communication forms created additional confusion. For example, the documents provided for review for this AAR did not include any ICS 205s (Incident Radio Communications Form) or 205A (Communications List). While the City does not have to use ICS Forms, it would be helpful to have a standardized communications plan that is trained on and regularly updated prior to the next emergency.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Staffing Documents, the PIGs, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 5.3: Create a staff communication plan that defines clear processes, assigns responsibilities, and incorporates backup methods such as text alerts or Teams notifications.** Regular drills using these systems will help ensure all staff receive consistent and reliable information during emergencies.

## Challenge #4 – Emergency Alert and Warning

**Discussion:** Emergency notifications are issued by City authorities to the public in the event of a hazard posing a risk to life safety. Alerts include instructions on necessary steps to protect life and property. The Everbridge alerting and notification application served as the City's local emergency notification system and was the primary tool for alerting the public about potential hazards and providing information on actions to protect life and property. The alerting system delivers notifications to specific areas via landline phones, cell phones, and email.

The demands of community Alert and Warning carry substantial consequences when not effectively carried out requiring the City to manage a complex program prior to an emergency incident. The speed of incidents posing significant threats to the safety and well-being of the population can occur rapidly requiring immediate community alerts. This has been seen in multiple critical incidents in recent years such as the fast-moving fires in the Franklin and Palisades fires. The systems used, various credible sources of communication that need to be deconflicted, inter-organizational coordination, and understanding diverse community needs in receiving emergency alerts are just a handful of issues that need to be managed and maintained demonstrating a need for dedicated staffing.

During the Franklin and Palisades Fires, the City issued alerts and notifications to the residents. Due to the extreme life safety threat, the County simultaneously sent its own alerts to Malibu residents. These alerts were sometimes sent without sufficient coordination with the City, this overlap led to some confusion and misunderstandings during critical periods of the emergency.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 5.4: Work with Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management to formalize emergency alert and notification protocols for emergency alerts and notifications.** This includes clarifying roles and responsibilities across agencies and jurisdictions related to emergency alert and notification. The City should also conduct regular alert and notification tests and exercises that include emergency alerting partners**.** Streamlining this process will improve timeliness, reduce duplication, and strengthen public confidence in emergency messaging.

## Challenge #5 – Power & Telecommunications Outages

**Discussion:** Power and telecommunications outages disrupted alerts and made it difficult (or even impossible) to maintain communication with the community and staff. As noted earlier, Public Safety Power Shut-Offs affected the entire communications infrastructure during critical response periods. Given the City's geography, these power and telecommunications challenges are likely to persist in future emergencies.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Palisades Cooperations Meeting Notes, other Operations and Logistics Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 5.5: Establish new communication and alert mechanisms that can operate independently of traditional infrastructure.** Options include 2-tone radios, LA-RICS radio receivers and sirens. Building redundancy into alerting and communications will ensure Malibu can sustain connectivity with staff and the public during future wildfires or infrastructure disruptions.

# Focus Area #6: Community Evacuation

The Palisades Fire emphasized the complexity of evacuation operations in Malibu and the importance of having well-defined procedures before an incident occurs. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) carried out its life safety responsibilities with dedication and focus, the City had limited pre-established evacuation procedures to guide staff during immediate evacuation operations. While LASD assumed primary responsibility for evacuation, their scope of work focused on immediate notification, life safety, and access control, leaving broader logistical and operational considerations under-addressed.

Public messaging was further complicated by changes to evacuation zones in the Genasys system. These changes created confusion among residents and agencies, especially since the City had limited involvement in establishing or adjusting temporary evacuation zones. Malibu's unique geography, limited access routes, and high evacuation demand underscore the importance of clearly defined and consistently communicated zones.

Finally, the incident highlighted the lack of formal post-evacuation re-entry and re-population plans. Without these frameworks, staff and responding agencies faced uncertainty regarding the timing and process of returning residents and resources, as well as access for City staff traveling from outside Malibu. These gaps created inefficiencies in resource tracking, accountability, and coordination.

Despite these challenges, the City and its partners showed adaptability and commitment to protecting the community. Strengthening evacuation and re-entry planning, clarifying roles, and ensuring consistent public messaging will position Malibu to more effectively manage future large-scale evacuation operations.

## Focus Area #6 Strengths

- The advanced training with LAPD, LAFD, and LASD was instrumental for the City's volunteers in providing evacuation assistance.
- Continuous monitoring of emergency and community-based apps (Pulse Point, Watch Duty, Genasys Protect, etc.) allowed for increased situational awareness, faster response times, and evacuation coordination.
- The LASD (with assistance from VOP) went door to door and used their Hi-Low Evacuation Systems on their vehicles to issue evacuation orders.
- The Genasys Protect application was used for providing evacuation information, and it is a tool that is available to the community. The platform is preferred for public evacuation zone information.

# Focus Area #6 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Evacuation Procedures for City Hall

**Discussion:** EOC staff worked diligently to manage protective actions during the fire, but the absence of detailed evacuation procedures for City Hall and the EOC created challenges for immediate EOC operations.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 6.1: Develop comprehensive evacuation procedures for City Hall and the EOC. Integrate them into the City's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).** Support these procedures with staff training and regular exercises to ensure familiarity, coordination, and confidence during future evacuations.

## Challenge #2 –Evacuation Coordination

**Discussion:** LASD effectively carried out life safety responsibilities during the Franklin and Palisades fires, but broader logistical needs of evacuation support were not fully addressed. Due to the immense department and agency response needed during both fires, at times, evacuation coordination was difficult for the City. While LASD has responsibility for operational elements (issuing evacuation orders, traffic management, etc.) during an evacuation, the City also has some evacuation responsibilities such as emergency alerts and supporting evacuation rally points when they are established.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 6.2: Formalize evacuation roles and scope within the evacuation process for Malibu.** This includes coordination and clarification on evacuation roles and responsibilities with other partners (such as LASD) responsibilities. This clarity will strengthen interagency coordination and ensure all aspects of evacuation are addressed.

## Challenge #3 – Evacuation Zone Management

**Discussion:** The Genasys Protect application served as an important tool for communicating evacuation zone information, but zone changes during the incident created confusion among both the public and agencies.

The City supported zone-based evacuations but had limited involvement in establishing or modifying zones during the incident. During the Palisades fire, Incident Command established sub-zones, which caused significant confusion in evacuations.

Before future evacuations, the City should coordinate with LASD and the LA County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to ensure that Malibu's unique geography and community needs are fully considered in evacuation zones and zone decision-making.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and EOC Action Plans

**Recommendation 6.3: Identify and clarify evacuation zones with the County for various hazard types and exercise them with City staff and partner agencies.** Coordinate closely with the County to ensure consistency of zone naming, boundaries, and messaging so the public receives clear and reliable guidance.

## Challenge #4 – Re-entry and Repopulation Planning

**Discussion:** The City coordinated closely with partners during re-entry, but the absence of formal re-entry and re-population plans limited consistency in managing staff and resident access after evacuations.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, and Recovery Documents

**Recommendation 6.4: Develop re-entry and re-population frameworks that establish clear criteria, agency roles, coordination mechanisms, and communication procedures for phased return of residents, staff, and critical resources.** Testing these frameworks during exercises will help refine the process and build public confidence in safe re-entry.

# Focus Area #7: Emergency Public Information

During the Palisades Fire, the City of Malibu's Public Information function demonstrated both innovation and dedication in keeping staff, elected officials, and the community informed. The development and use of the Public Information Guide (PIG) provided a single, efficient tool for disseminating consistent information to leadership, staff, partners, and other audiences. Public Information Officers (PIOs) sent frequent emails to all City staff with updates, attempting to provide a common understanding of the evolving situation. However, not all staff received the email and/or it wasn't a known situational update method for staff (see Focus Area #5: Communications and Recommendation 5.3: Staff Communications for further details).

The City's PIOs successfully provided daily status briefings to elected officials, which enhanced transparency, built confidence, and strengthened communication between City leadership and the public. The City's vendor support for social media, website management, and messaging also proved valuable in amplifying communications during the incident.

At the same time, challenges arose in obtaining timely and detailed information from other response partners to support public information efforts. This gap limited the City's ability to quickly update the community on certain aspects of the response. Additionally, neither the County nor Incident Command established a Joint Information Center (JIC), which would typically serve as a hub for coordinated messaging across agencies. Without a JIC, Malibu's PIOs was responsible for ensuring consistent public messaging.

Overall, Malibu's Public Information function was resourceful and effective in many areas, but the incident emphasized the importance of stronger coordination with partners and the need to integrate into County- and incident-level JIC structures in future events.

## Focus Area #7 Strengths

- The City's PIOs did a great job of utilizing all publicly accessible information (such as Cal Fire, surrounding jurisdictions social media, etc.) during response efforts.
- Both fires provided on the job training for the City PIOs.
- The PIOs were creative in finding methods to disseminate information during response efforts.
- The creation and use of the Public Information Guides (PIGs) was valuable to staff and other partners.

# Focus Area #7 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Social Media & Public Information

**Discussion:** The City worked diligently to share timely updates with the public, though limited staffing made it difficult to manage social media and online communication during response and recovery.

During the Franklin Fire, the City developed a custom public-facing website that was well received. However, maintaining it required significant staff time and frequent updates throughout the response. To improve efficiency, the City should develop pre-established templates for incident-specific webpages that can be quickly activated during emergencies. These pages should serve as a centralized source of regularly updated information, reducing confusion and ensuring consistent messaging across platforms.

During the Palisades Fire, the City developed and distributed a Public Information Guide (PIG), which was well received by both staff and the public. However, the City did not create a custom website or establish a cadence (or structure) for releasing public information during this incident. Hotline staff also reported feeling unprepared to answer complex questions (particularly those involving individuals that had to find out their home was burned to the ground). Finally, interviews revealed a broader shortage of staff trained in public information roles within the City.

Overall, the City's social media and public information efforts varied significantly by Public Information Officer (PIO) and operational period. Adequate pre-incident planning and clear procedures are essential to support staff in fulfilling their roles. Because the PIO team is small and will likely need to draw on additional resources from within the organization or external partners, having standardized tools and guidance in place will be critical to ensuring staff confidence and consistency across operational periods. This includes the formation of a PIO Team and/or a Public Information Branch (even if it is contracted out) within the EOC.

Plans and procedures will need to streamline emergency public information communications processes to ensure rapid and timely release of information from the PIO. Continue planning efforts to support information dissemination across multiple communication platforms and through channels not tied to web-based communication, with considerations for accessibility for non-English speaking populations and individuals with disabilities or others with access and functional needs.

One additional comment from the interviews included the recommendation for the City to host a City radio station for delivering emergency information to the public.

*Reference:* Public Information Guides (PIGs), Public Announcements/Website Updates, other Public Information Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 7. 1: Establish a dedicated Public Information Officer (PIO) team/Public Information Branch or contractual surge capacity to handle social media, rumor control, public hotlines, incident specific website(s), and online engagement during major incidents.** The Public Information Officer (PIO) and other public information staff should continue to utilize the Public Information Group (PIG) during incidents and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activations. The PIG should be formalized, with established procedures and protocols for information updates and dissemination. This will enhance the City's ability to provide real-time updates, counter misinformation, and maintain public trust.

## Challenge #2 – Elected Official Briefings

**Discussion:** Daily status briefs for the City Council built confidence, transparency, and trust between leadership and the emergency management team. While elected officials demonstrated tremendous dedication and support to response actions, it was observed that these efforts can be enhanced through establishing formal briefings and an EOC policy group to help coordinate public information dissemination (see Focus Area #3). Additionally, by enhancing the coordination between the EOC and the Elected Officials, the public will receive consistent emergency information and updates. Establishing talking points and scheduled public briefing sessions for Elected Officials will help ensure they are included in response efforts as well as maintaining their public interests. Regular briefings tailored to the community will strengthen public confidence and help counter misinformation during prolonged emergencies.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, Media releases, and City Council Documents

**Recommendation 7.2: Coordinate Public Briefings by Elected Officials and continue the internal Elected Official Briefings.**

## Challenge #3 – Joint Information Center (JIC)

**Discussion:** The absence of a Joint Information Center (JIC) created challenges in coordinating messaging across agencies and jurisdictions. For example, the lack of communication and coordination protocols resulted in delayed messaging to the public. Regular coordination meetings, information-sharing agreements, and inclusion of City partner agencies in exercises will help reduce delays and improve message accuracy.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, and Media releases

**Recommendation 7.3: Work with partner agencies and Incident Command to advocate for JIC activation during significant incidents.** Ensure Malibu PIOs are integrated into JIC operations when activated, enabling unified messaging and better coordination with regional partners.

## Challenge #4 –Public Information Support

**Discussion:** The City's public information vendor support was highly effective in managing social media, website updates, and message flow, but capacity may be strained during longer or multiple concurrent incidents.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan, EOC Action Plans, and Media releases

**Recommendation 7.4: Sustain current vendor support arrangements and consider pre-identifying surge vendors for additional capacity.** Establishing agreements in advance will ensure the City can quickly scale its communication capabilities when incident complexity or duration demands it.

# Focus Area #8: Technology

Technology played a central role in Malibu's response to the Palisades Fire, offering both valuable tools and areas where capabilities could be strengthened. The City effectively leveraged Microsoft for situation status (SitStat), scheduling, and internal coordination. Staff reported that Teams provided flexibility, ease of use, and an accessible platform for collaboration across multiple locations. Similarly, applications such as WatchDuty proved valuable in enhancing situational awareness and providing real-time updates on fire activity. These systems and other applications are essential to facilitate the management of situational information and intelligence, managing resources to staff and equipping response personnel, track costs and expenditures, providing for damage assessments, communicating with threatened communities, among multiple additional critical actions.

At the same time, several technology challenges limited operational efficiency. The City's EOC software system was described as cumbersome, with both internal staff and external partners experiencing difficulties in access and navigation. In addition, the absence of a dedicated Geographic Information System (GIS) capability also restricted the City's ability to provide data-driven mapping and analysis to support informed decision-making during the fire.

Relocating to alternate EOC facilities presented additional obstacles. Staff encountered difficulties accessing SharePoint and network drives, creating delays in retrieving key documents and data. These access issues reinforced the importance of ensuring continuity and redundancy in technology systems during relocations or disruptions.

Overall, Malibu's use of modern collaboration tools and third-party applications enhanced coordination and awareness, but the event also demonstrated the need for greater investment in GIS, and more resilient access to shared systems.

## Focus Area #8 Strengths

- The City used multiple collaboration tools in the EOC.
- SharePoint, Microsoft Teams, and other file sharing tools provided greater collaboration for EOC staff.
- EOC staff demonstrated resilience by successfully relocating the EOC multiple times and utilized all the available tools to continue responding to the emergency. IT staff were instrumental in EOC relocation efforts as well as EOC support in general. The EOC could not function without them.

# Focus Area #8 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – Virtual Collaboration Tools

**Discussion:** At the start of the Franklin Fire, EOC staff used the existing EOC software system for status tracking and document management. Although the system served as the official information management system, many found it cumbersome and difficult to use. External partners lacked both access and training, and some EOC staff were also not trained in advance. Midway through the emergency, the system was abandoned in favor of Microsoft Teams which many staff members were more familiar with, and it proved more effective for the response.

During the remainder of the Franklin Fire and during the Palisades Fire, Microsoft Teams proved highly effective for situational status tracking and coordination, giving staff a reliable and adaptable collaboration platform. However, it still required some staff to learn a new technology tool while simultaneously determining how best to collaborate within it. The lack of a predefined structure and procedures complicated implementation. And because some staff had limited exposure to the system, many struggled with basic navigation. As a result, personnel relied on both paper-based forms and digital tools, creating significant tracking and coordination challenges.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 8.1: Continue using Microsoft Teams or choose a virtual collaboration tool for EOC operations.** Pre-configure the platform/tool for key functions, establish standard workflows, ensure EOC staff access and permission, and train staff to ensure familiarity and efficiency during activations. Regular use of a virtual collaboration tool during exercises will further strengthen staff readiness and reduce set-up time during emergencies.

## Challenge #2 – Geographic Information System (GIS) Capability

**Discussion:** While staff worked resourcefully to manage situation status displays, the absence of GIS and mapping tools limited the City's ability to support decision-making with geospatial analysis. GIS capabilities provide tremendous capabilities to develop more informed decisions and support operational missions through the use of mapping products and associated data. The use of GIS provides visual understanding of geographic components of the incident allowing for better understanding of incident conditions.

Geographic elements are embedded in nearly all aspects of an incident, including the Franklin and Palisades fires. As a result, there is significant demand for mapping products to support EOC objectives and the needs of almost every EOC position. If a GIS role is established within the EOC, a system must be in place to manage this demand. The process should prioritize requests, track them to ensure completion, and provide visibility into the level of effort required from GIS personnel through a centralized request system.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 8.2: Staff a GIS unit within the EOC by designating trained personnel, acquiring appropriate software, and developing standard mapping products to support planning, operations, and public information.** Regular training and exercises will help embed GIS into daily operations and enhance situational awareness.

## Challenge #3 – Shared Drives and Network Access During EOC Relocations

**Discussion:** EOC Staff were able to continue operations during EOC relocations, but access to SharePoint and network drives was difficult from alternate EOC sites, slowing information flow. EOC staff were constantly trying to re-establish a Common Operating Picture (COP) at each new EOC location. It was a massive challenge to access shared drives and the network at each new location. Often, VPN access was slow, unstable, or blocked by the host jurisdiction's firewall or bandwidth limitations. Even when VPN access did work, large files (maps, plans, spreadsheets) loaded slowly or failed to sync. Network drives, departmental shared drives, and internal portals (e.g., SharePoint, intranet) were inaccessible without a proper connection. Critical software interfaces, (such as finance systems) were locked behind internal firewalls. Printers and scanners were tied to the City network and were unusable. Mixed with this was the use of external partners in the EOC that did not have the authorized permissions and access to shared drives.

*Reference:* Interview Notes

**Recommendation 8.3: Enhance cloud-based access and implement redundancies to ensure critical shared drives and networks are available regardless of location**. Test connectivity and access at alternate facilities in advance to confirm systems will function reliably during relocations. Consider mobile EOC options to reduce the reliance on alternate facilities in other jurisdictions.

## Challenge #4 –Situational Awareness Tools

**Discussion:** WatchDuty and other real-time situational awareness applications proved valuable for monitoring fire progression and sharing timely updates. While the Public Safety staff utilize them regularly, this was not a previously needed process within the EOC. These applications provided real-time fire updates and information that EOC staff can utilize for situational awareness and operational decisions.

*Reference:* Interview Notes

**Recommendation 8.4: Incorporate situational awareness applications into EOC standard operating procedures and provide training for staff to maximize their utility.** Embedding them into the City's information management framework will strengthen situational awareness and support faster, more informed decision-making.

# Focus Area #9: Emergency Purchasing Process

The Palisades Fire highlighted the importance of clear purchasing procedures to support timely resource acquisition during emergencies. Purchase processing includes resources obtained through a credit card for small items. Malibu staff demonstrated initiative and adaptability in securing needed resources, but the absence of standardized processes created challenges in record keeping and disaster cost recovery. Staff used a variety of purchasing methods during the response, which complicated financial tracking and reduced consistency in documentation.

The City did not have an emergency-specific purchasing policy in place, limiting staff's ability to efficiently obtain resources while ensuring compliance with federal disaster cost recovery requirements. Without this framework, purchasing actions were carried out inconsistently, increasing the administrative burden during and after the incident.

Additionally, the City did not have pre-existing contracts or agreements with vendors for critical needs such as hotels, car rentals, or other services to support staff and mutual aid resources when relocating to alternate facilities. The lack of pre-negotiated agreements made it more difficult to quickly secure accommodation and logistical support during relocation, adding stress to already complex operations.

Overall, Malibu's response demonstrated resourcefulness but underscored the need for a clear procurement framework, as well as pre-established agreements with vendors to support future activations and EOC relocations.

## Focus Area #9 Strengths

- Finance staff worked hard to create and maintain financial records during the response efforts.
- The recovery efforts were able to pivot to a more robust financial tracking process.
- City staff were very creative in working around emergency procurement issues.

## Focus Area #9 Challenges & Recommendations

### Challenge #1 – Emergency Procurement Policy

**Discussion:** Staff resourcefully managed purchases during the incident, though the absence of a standardized emergency procurement policy created uncertainty and risk for reimbursement. Staff used their personal credit cards and other creative methods to purchase items to support response operations.

*Reference*: EOC Action Plans, Finance Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 9.1: Develop a formal emergency procurement and purchasing policy that aligns with FEMA and Cal OES cost recovery requirements.** Clearly outline staff roles, thresholds for emergency purchases, and documentation expectations to ensure compliance and consistency during activations.

## Challenge #2 – Standardized Recordkeeping Practices

**Discussion:** Purchasing and documentation processes were maintained under pressure, but inconsistencies made it more difficult to track expenses and prepare reimbursement packages. The switch from the existing EOC software system to Microsoft Teams partially contributed to this challenge as well as staffing changes within the Finance and Administration Section during response operations.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Finance Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 9.2: Establish uniform processes for documenting purchases, including consistent use of ICS forms, purchase logs, and financial tracking systems.** Embedding these practices into training and exercises will help staff capture required documentation in real time and support smoother reimbursement.

## Challenge #3 – Pre-Negotiated Vendor Agreements

**Discussion:** Staff quickly secured resources during the incident, but the lack of pre-arranged agreements with critical vendors delayed logistical support at times.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Finance Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 9.3: Negotiate contracts ahead of time with hotels, car rental companies, and other essential vendors to ensure timely logistical support for staff, mutual aid personnel, and displaced operations**. Building these agreements in advance will reduce delays, reduce use of staff personal finances, provide cost predictability, and strengthen continuity.

## Challenge #4 – Integration of Procurement into Continuity Planning

**Discussion:** EOC staff sustained operations during relocations, but the absence of procurement planning in continuity efforts created additional challenges in accessing needed resources.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Finance Section Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 9.4: Integrate procurement policies and vendor agreements into EOC continuity and relocation planning.** Ensure that alternate facilities have pre-identified resource pathways, reducing friction during transitions and enabling seamless support for staff during extended activations.

# Focus Area #10: Workforce & Staff Sustainability

The Franklin and Palisades fires underscored both the resilience and dedication of Malibu's workforce, as well as the need for policies and systems that sustain personnel during prolonged activations. Staff commitment was evident throughout the incident, with employees demonstrating adaptability, flexibility, and a willingness to assume diverse roles under pressure. These qualities provided tremendous value to the City's response efforts.

At the same time, the incident highlighted several structural challenges that affected sustainability and staff well-being. The City has fewer than 100 full-time staff and only two highly trained emergency managers, leaving it understaffed to fulfill many of the basic city services while also responding to disasters. These limitations created difficulties in staffing the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), especially when training participation was inconsistent. Most staff found it difficult to make time for the training needed to fulfill EOC roles, and no incentives currently exist to encourage or reward participation.

Extended work hours, coupled with limited staffing depth, led to extreme fatigue and safety concerns. The absence of overtime compensation for exempt employees contributed to perceptions of inequity between salaried and hourly staff. In some cases, staff questioned the fairness of assignments or deployment distribution, which impacted willingness to respond. Attrition further reduced staffing capacity, underscoring the need for long-term workforce investment.

Continuity of operations also presented challenges, with concerns raised about prioritizing ongoing projects while managing disaster response responsibilities. Relocation of the EOC introduced additional burdens, including staff who traveled long distances only to be released, in the absence of policies addressing financial or time impacts.

Behavioral health emerged as a critical factor during the incident. Prolonged activations, stressful conditions, and the fire's impact on the community highlighted the need for wellness monitoring. The City's HR team played an important role by facilitating wellness activities and resources and providing much-needed support to staff during high-stress periods.

Overall, Malibu's workforce demonstrated commitment and resilience, but the event emphasized the need for clear and equitable personnel policies, improved staffing sustainability, stronger wellness and continuity practices, and expanded emergency management capacity to maintain a healthy and effective workforce during future emergencies.

# Focus Area #10 Strengths

- The EOC staff were very resilient and displayed extreme dedication to response efforts for the City.
- EOC staff all contributed to the AAR process and discussed how meaningful the AAR process was for closure of the fire responses.
- Therapy dogs and other wellness activities were very appreciated.
- The external staffing support and liaisons (Cal Fire and Cal OES reps) were very helpful later in the response operations.

# Focus Area #10 Challenges & Recommendations

## Challenge #1 – EOC Staff Fatigue and Sustainability

**Discussion:** The City has fewer than 100 staff and only two highly trained emergency managers, limiting its ability to meet both day-to-day service demands and emergency response needs. EOC Staff demonstrated dedication by sustaining long shifts and maintaining operations under pressure, but limited staffing depth created safety concerns and extreme fatigue. Overall, the EOC probably remained active for too long, which also contributed to staff fatigue and a lack of sustainability for future operations.

The City should implement a structured method for shift planning that accounts for rest cycles, commute times, and safe staffing rotations. The City should consider conducting a review of staffing based on requirements outlined in the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and experiences gained during EOC activations. Identify needed positions and determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for each position. This will facilitate the identification of staff or external personnel to fill these positions.

Staff maintained operations despite attrition, but reduced depth strained response capacity and limited surge staffing options. The City lacks sufficient depth to surge staffing during prolonged activations. The City should invest in staff development, retention, and succession planning to build workforce depth.

*Reference:* EOC Staffing Documents and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.1: Expand EOC staffing levels and ensure staff considerations are included in shift planning.** Building a sustainable staffing model will improve time management, protect personnel's health, enhance decision-making, and reduce risks during extended activations. Additionally, the City may want to explore contracting or hiring part-time/as-needed emergency management professionals to serve as part of an EOC Incident Management Reserve Team, ensuring surge support during activations. As a final element that could help augment EOC staffing levels, the City may want to consider establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with neighboring jurisdictions to provide mutual aid in emergency management staffing. Leveraging regional partnerships will strengthen capacity and ensure support during complex incidents.

## Challenge #2 – Assignment and Deployment

**Discussion**: City staff adapted to a wide range of roles and responsibilities but concerns over fairness in assignments and deployment distribution affected willingness to respond. While all City staff are Disaster Service Workers (DSWs), some City staff were not part of the EOC operations, and this contributed to the perception of unfair burden on some City staff vs. others that were not working during the fires. Additionally, HR did not have awareness of geographic locations of where staff lived or current contact information, which caused additional stress on EOC staff and other responders.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans, Staffing Documents, and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.2: Develop transparent assignment protocols that clarify how roles are allocated during activations**. Communicate decision-making processes openly to staff to strengthen trust, promote fairness, and encourage participation in future incidents. Maintain current rosters and callback lists for City staff.

## Challenge #3 – EOC Relocation Impacts

**Discussion:** Personnel adapted to EOC relocations, but no policy addressed the added time, costs, or personal burdens on staff during these moves due to miscommunication or mismanagement of EOC staff and their time. One of the individuals interviewed recommended hotel/lodging accommodation for staff with extraordinarily long commute times. This is coupled with Finding #2 on the assignment and deployment of City staff during response operations.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.3: Develop EOC relocation support policies that recognize and mitigate staff impacts, such as mileage reimbursement, meal stipends, lodging accommodations, or flexible scheduling.** Addressing these challenges will sustain morale and ensure staff are supported during relocations.

## Challenge #4 – Training Participation and Incentives

Discussion: Training and exercising plans, procedures, policies, and systems is critical to ensure that assigned EOC and other incident management personnel are adequately familiar with incident management principles and the guidance documents that drive the City's responses. It is essential that there is support for the City training and exercise program at the highest levels of the organization to ensure that departments buy in and actively participate in training and exercise opportunities.

Overall, City staff participation in training and exercises related to EOC action plans, procedures, and processes was inconsistent. This inconsistency affected all aspects of response management, including establishing and staffing the response structure, utilizing emergency response plans effectively, and

applying processes developed and adopted by the City. Limited socialization of existing emergency plans, combined with insufficient opportunities to demonstrate response competencies through routine training and exercises, likely contributed to gaps in familiarity and confidence among City executives and staff. To address these issues, the City should review incident staffing requirements and assess the effectiveness of its current training and exercise program.

Prior to the recent fire response operations, many staff found it difficult to make time for required training, and no incentives exist to encourage participation. During the general debrief session, staff expressed concerns about the length of training sessions and their ability to perform their daily work along with the added training requirements. Expand training opportunities to prepare new staff for EOC roles and ensure the City maintains readiness even with turnover. One individual suggested keeping training to under a half an hour to promote participation.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.4: Explore an in-house collateral assignment program to establish an EOC Incident Management Team**. Staff could apply to participate, receive collateral pay, and commit to a minimum of four hours of training per month to build readiness. This recommendation also dovetails with recommendation 10.1.

## Challenge #5 – Compensation and Equity

**Discussion:** Staff commitment was evident across classifications, though exempt personnel were ineligible for overtime, creating perceptions of inequity compared to hourly staff.

*Reference:* Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.5: Update policies to ensure fair and transparent compensation during prolonged emergencies.** Clearly define expectations for all personnel classifications and consider flexible compensation mechanisms to support equity and morale.

## Challenge #6 – Continuity of Operations

**Discussion:** Personnel balanced emergency response with ongoing projects, though some staff raised concerns about how continuity of core City services was prioritized.

*Reference:* City Emergency Operations Plan and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.6: Integrate continuity of operations planning into workforce strategies.** Identify essential projects, designate backup staff, and establish procedures to ensure critical services continue without overburdening emergency response personnel.

## Challenge #7 – Behavioral Health and Wellness

**Discussion:** Staff demonstrated remarkable resilience despite stress, long hours, and the broader impacts on the community, highlighting the critical need for wellness support. The use of therapy dogs and other wellness activities was both necessary and highly appreciated by EOC personnel. The absence of a dedicated "administrative" function in the EOC contributed to significant stress, fatigue, and eventual burnout. Although the EOC Safety Officer was active during response operations, this role focuses on physical safety rather than staff wellbeing. Establishing a dedicated EOC position responsible for staff wellness and mental health would help mitigate these challenges and support the overall resilience of the EOC team.

*Reference:* EOC Action Plans and Interview Notes

**Recommendation 10.7: Formalize behavioral health monitoring and integrate HR-led wellness resources into EOC operations**. Provide access to peer support, counseling, and recovery resources to sustain staff well-being during and after emergencies.

# SECTION 4 - CLOSING SUMMARY

The Franklin and Palisades fires were defining events for the City of Malibu that tested every facet of its emergency management system while also showcasing the resilience and dedication of its workforce and community. Staff resourcefulness, interagency collaboration, and the City's organizational commitment to public safety were evident throughout both incidents, enabling Malibu to navigate one of the most complex and destructive wildfire seasons in its history.

At the same time, these events underscored the urgent need to adapt Malibu's systems, policies, and resources to a new operational reality. More frequent, higher-consequence disasters demand deeper staffing capacity, stronger continuity and relocation planning, redundant communications infrastructure, and consistent governance processes that align leadership with EOC operations. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance readiness but also build trust across the community and with regional partners.

This After-Action Report documents both the strengths and challenges of Malibu's response. It provides a roadmap for targeted improvements across preparedness, governance, operations, communications, evacuation, workforce sustainability, and recovery planning. By institutionalizing lessons learned, formalizing policies and agreements, and investing in resilient systems and staff development, Malibu can strengthen its ability to safeguard lives, sustain critical services, and support recovery when future disasters occur.

Through continued collaboration with County, State, and Federal partners (and by building on the dedication of its staff and community) Malibu can transform these hard-won lessons into lasting resilience.

# APPENDIX I: ACRONYMS

**AAR** – After Action Report

**Cal OES** – California Office of Emergency Services

**Cal Fire** – California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

**DMAC** – Disaster Management Area Coordinator

**DSW** – Disaster Service Worker

**EMAC** – Emergency Management Assistance Compact

**EMMA** – Emergency Management Mutual Aid

**EOC** – Emergency Operations Center

**FEMA** – Federal Emergency Management Agency

**GIS** – Geographic Information System

**IAP** – Incident Action Plan

**ICS** – Incident Command System

**IP** – Improvement Plan

**JIC** – Joint Information Center

**LA County OEM** – Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management

**LA-RICS** – Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System

**LASD** – Los Angeles Sherrif's Department

**MOU** – Memorandum of Understanding

**PIG** – Public Information Guide

**PIO** – Public Information Officer

**SEMS** – Standard Emergency Management System

**Sit Stat** – Satiation Status

**SO** – Sheriff's Office

# APPENDIX II: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The following Improvement Plan (IP) matrix summarizes the recommended areas for improvement, department/unit responsible, and status of improvement action that are identified throughout the AAR. Items identified in this IP are specific to the Franklin and Palisades fire response. The challenges and recommendations in this report provide greater detail and explanation for each of the following recommendations.

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus Area #1: Preparedness** | | | |
| **1.1** | Implement a more frequent and structured training and exercise schedule that accommodates frequent activations while reinforcing role familiarity. | | |
| **1.2** | Develop and adopt a Citywide emergency response policy applicable to all staff, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations during emergencies. | | |
| **1.3** | Develop and adopt a comprehensive disaster recovery plan that provides a structured framework for operations, including prioritization of services, coordination with external partners, and financial and administrative recovery considerations. | | |
| **1.4** | Establish continuity procedures, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), and logistical agreements for alternate or mobile EOC facilities. | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1.5** | Develop and integrate volunteer and donations management planning into the City's emergency operations framework. | | |
| **Focus Area #2: EOC & Incident Management** | | | |
| **2.1** | Establish a formal EOC Policy Group composed of the City Management Team to provide strategic guidance and executive-level decision-making during major incidents. | | |
| **2.2** | Institutionalize the planning process by making it a routine element of all EOC activations, regardless of scale or duration. | | |
| **2.3** | Dedicate trained staff to Finance and Administration functions within the EOC to ensure that financial tracking, purchasing, and documentation are prioritized from the start of an incident. | | |
| **2.4** | Develop formal EOC relocation protocols that clearly define roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, readiness criteria, and step-by-step procedures for relocating operations. | | |
| **2.5** | Explore acquisition or lease of a mobile command trailer to provide a deployable, scalable option for sustaining EOC functions or supporting staff at the ICP. | | |
| **Focus Area #3: Governance & Policy** | | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3.1** | Develop a clear, documented process in emergency plans that defines how and when the Elected Policy Group should be involved during emergencies. | | |
| **3.2** | Establish procedures that ensure coordination and communication between the EOC Policy Group and the Elected Policy Group to better support EOC operations. | | |
| **3.3** | Establish clear emergency readiness benchmarks—such as EOC facility safety, infrastructure availability/access (such as roadways being open), and staffing support for EOC relocation and re-entry operations. | | |
| **Focus Area #4: Operational Coordination** | | | |
| **4.1** | Maintain and expand the role of Fire Liaisons in emergency operations by clearly defining their responsibilities in plans and incorporating them into training and exercises. | | |
| **4.2** | Standardize a unified resource tracking process and train staff on its consistent application across all incidents. | | |
| **4.3** | Develop a trained pool of Planning Section staff to serve in the Situation Unit, with clear responsibilities for maintaining situational displays, maps, and updates. | | |

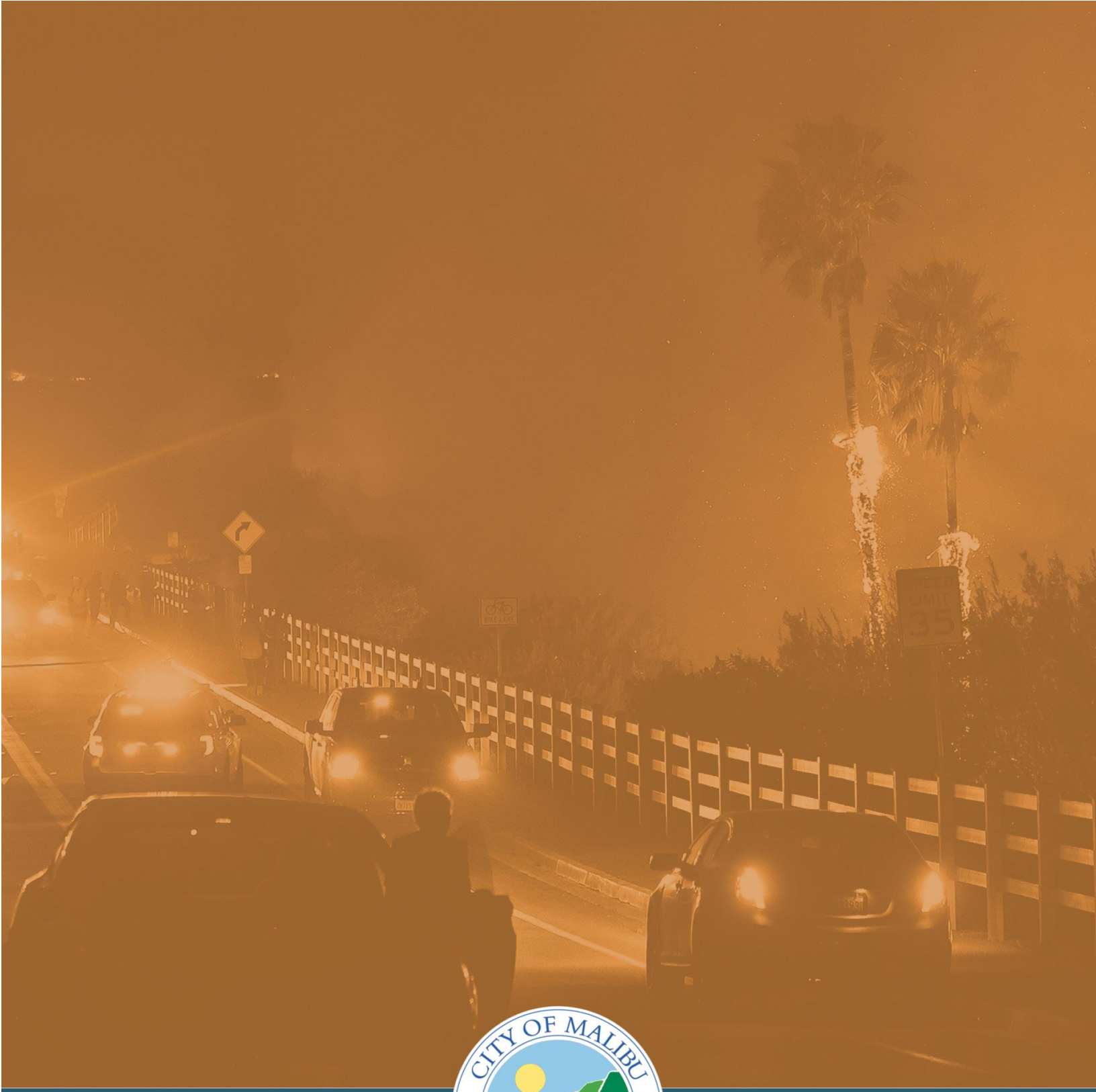
| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **4.4** | Align staff assignments more closely with training and experience while expanding cross-training to provide flexibility for surge staffing. | | |
| **4.5** | Configure Microsoft Teams channels, sync key files, and establish standardized digital workflows prior to activation. | | |
| **4.6** | Expand staff training and familiarity with regional coordination systems and partners. | | |
| **4.7** | Continue to prioritize regional planning and joint exercises with agencies responsible for coastal, mountain, and highway operations. | | |
| **4.8** | Augment EOC staffing capacity by establishing pre-incident agreements/MAAs with qualified external consultants and within the EMMA system to support critical roles during major EOC activations. | | |
| **Focus Area #5: Communication** | | | |
| **5.1** | Expand use of resilient systems such as LA-RICS and mobile communication options, pursue additional redundancies, and ensure alternate EOCs are equipped with a reliable communication infrastructure. | | |
| **5.2** | Establish and test alternate EOC sites for communications readiness, including | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | internet connectivity, phone systems, and collaboration tools. | | |
| **5.3** | Create a staff communication plan that defines clear processes, assigns responsibilities, and incorporates backup methods such as text alerts or Teams notifications. | | |
| **5.4** | Work with Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management to formalize emergency alert and notification protocols for emergency alerts and notifications. | | |
| **5.5** | Establish new communication and alert mechanisms that can operate independently of traditional infrastructure. | | |
| **Focus Area #6: Community Evacuation** | | | |
| **6.1** | Develop comprehensive evacuation procedures for City Hall and the EOC. Integrate them into the City's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). | | |
| **6.2** | Formalize evacuation roles and scope within the evacuation process for Malibu. | | |
| **6.3** | Identify and clarify evacuation zones with the County for various hazard types and exercise them with City staff and partner agencies. | | |
| **6.4** | Develop re-entry and re-population frameworks that establish clear criteria, | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | agency roles, coordination mechanisms, and communication procedures for phased return of residents, staff, and critical resources. | | |
| **Focus Area #7: Emergency Public Information** | | | |
| **7.1** | Establish a dedicated Public Information Officer (PIO) team/Public Information Branch or contractual surge capacity to handle social media, rumor control, public hotlines, incident specific website(s), and online engagement during major incidents. | | |
| **7.2** | Coordinate Public Briefings by Elected Officials and continue the internal Elected Official Briefings. | | |
| **7.3** | Work with partner agencies and Incident Command to advocate for JIC activation during significant incidents. | | |
| **7.4** | Sustain current vendor support arrangements and consider pre-identifying surge vendors for additional capacity. | | |
| **Focus Area #8: Technology** | | | |
| **8.1** | Continue using Microsoft Teams or choose a virtual collaboration tool for EOC operations. | | |
| **8.2** | Staff a GIS unit within the EOC by designating trained personnel, acquiring appropriate software, and developing standard mapping products to support | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | planning, operations, and public information. | | |
| **8.3** | Enhance cloud-based access and implement redundancies to ensure critical shared drives and networks are available regardless of location. | | |
| **8.4** | Incorporate situational awareness applications into EOC standard operating procedures and provide training for staff to maximize their utility. | | |
| **Focus Area #9: Emergency Purchasing Process** | | | |
| **9.1** | Develop a formal emergency procurement and purchasing policy that aligns with FEMA and Cal OES cost recovery requirements. | | |
| **9.2** | Establish uniform processes for documenting purchases, including consistent use of ICS forms, purchase logs, and financial tracking systems. | | |
| **9.3** | Negotiate contracts ahead of time with hotels, car rental companies, and other essential vendors to ensure timely logistical support for staff, mutual aid personnel, and displaced operations. | | |
| **9.4** | Integrate procurement policies and vendor agreements into EOC continuity and relocation planning. | | |

| Finding | Recommendations | Responsible Entity | Status/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus Area #10: Workforce and Staff Sustainability** | | | |
| **10.1** | Expand EOC staffing levels and ensure staff considerations are included in shift planning. | | |
| **10.2** | Develop transparent assignment protocols that clarify how roles are allocated during activations. | | |
| **10.3** | Develop EOC relocation support policies that recognize and mitigate staff impacts, such as mileage reimbursement, meal stipends, lodging accommodations, or flexible scheduling. | | |
| **10.4** | Explore an in-house collateral assignment program to establish an EOC Incident Management Team. | | |
| **10.5** | Update policies to ensure fair and transparent compensation during prolonged emergencies. | | |
| **10.6** | Integrate continuity of operations planning into workforce strategies. | | |
| **10.7** | Formalize behavioral health monitoring and integrate HR-led wellness resources into EOC operations. | | |



# After-Action Review of the City's Response to the Franklin and Palisades Fires