



City of Malibu News

23825 Stuart Ranch Road • Malibu, California • 90265-4861
Phone (310) 456-2489 • Fax (310) 456-3356 • www.malibucity.org

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.

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.

###

Media Contact

Matt Myerhoff, Media Information Officer, City of Malibu
C: (424) 395-6450
mmyerhoff@malibucity.org