

California All-Risk Governance Doctrine

How California Leads Through Any Crisis

Rooted in Lessons from the Palisades Fire (2025)

I. Executive Overview

The **Palisades Fire** exposed critical governance, coordination, and preparedness gaps at the local level in **Los Angeles**, underscoring the urgent need for a broader examination of municipal readiness across **California**. These findings make clear that California can no longer manage emergencies through isolated, reactive responses. The state operates within a **permanent all-risk threat environment**, where natural, technological, and human-caused hazards are increasingly frequent, complex, and cascading.

California's seismic history further amplifies this risk. The Northridge (1994) and Loma Prieta (1989) earthquakes remain the last large-scale seismic events to significantly disrupt power, communications, transportation, and emergency services. As a result, an entire generation of public safety professionals has **never experienced a catastrophic earthquake** involving prolonged outages, collapsed structures, fires, mass casualties, and overwhelmed 911 systems. This generational gap presents a serious readiness challenge that must be addressed proactively—before the next major event occurs.

To meet this reality, California must shift decisively from **reactive emergency management to proactive crisis governance**. This requires adopting a disciplined **Recognize, Respond, Resolve** approach:

- **Recognize** emerging threats early through enhanced warning systems, weather watches, AI-assisted predictive modeling, tsunami and seismic impact mapping, and real-time infrastructure monitoring.
- **Respond** with pre-authorized actions, automatic mutual aid, and interoperable coordination—rather than ad-hoc decision-making under pressure.
- **Resolve** incidents fully through recovery, accountability, and institutional learning to prevent recurrence.

Key components of this shift include establishing **advanced and automatic mutual aid agreements**—particularly with Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona—for utilities, law enforcement, emergency management, and critical infrastructure support. The state should also institutionalize a **Unified Command or Crisis Governance Board**, composed of experienced crisis leaders, to advise the Governor and to be mirrored at the local level to advise mayors, fire chiefs, and law enforcement leaders. Clear **trigger points** must be defined to initiate executive-level coordination early, rather than after conditions deteriorate.

Technology must serve as a trusted enabler of preparedness. This includes enhanced wildfire and hazard detection through cameras, drones, heat and sensor networks, and evacuation modeling tools, as well as rigorous **testing of communications systems** for failure scenarios caused by earthquakes, natural disasters, or cyberattacks.

While the accompanying plan was originally developed for the City of Los Angeles, its structure is intentionally scalable. It can and should be elevated into a **statewide all-risk governance model**, with coordinated, right-sized versions implemented by local municipalities. Success depends on a shared mindset shift: municipalities and the state must move together—from reactive response toward **proactive, unified, and accountable crisis governance**—to ensure California is prepared not just for the last disaster, but for the next one.

I. Executive Overview — An All-Risk State Governance Model

California faces a **permanent threat environment**, not isolated emergencies.

Wildfires, earthquakes, floods, cyberattacks, infrastructure failures, public-health emergencies, and civil disruptions no longer occur in isolation. They cascade, compound, and overlap—turning single incidents into **statewide governance crises**.

The Palisades Fire (2025) was not just a wildfire failure. It was a **system failure under stress**—the same failure pattern that would emerge during:

- A major earthquake with power and water disruption
- A cyberattack on utilities or emergency communications
- A flood compromising transportation and hospitals
- A public-health emergency overwhelming supply chains
- Civil unrest combined with infrastructure failure

This plan establishes a **Governor-led, all-risk executive governance architecture** that ensures California is prepared to **recognize, respond, recover, and reform**—regardless of hazard type.

Under **Governor Steve Hilton**, California will no longer govern crisis-by-crisis. It will govern **continuously, adaptively, and accountably**.

II. Key Failures at the City Hall & Mayoral Level

1. Absence of Leadership During Crisis

- The Mayor's absence during critical Red Flag conditions symbolized a breakdown in executive presence.
- No continuity-of-command mechanism activated in the Mayor's absence.

2. Failure to Pre-Position Resources

- Despite clear forecasts, no surge order or predictive activation occurred.
- Resulted in delayed response and preventable escalation.

3. Infrastructure Oversight Lapses

- Santa Ynez Reservoir offline and hydrant system collapse occurred under City control.
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) accountability mechanisms failed, and coordination with LAFD was nonexistent.

4. Fragmented Crisis Communication

- Inconsistent messaging confused residents and media, damaging public trust.
- Absence of unified public information command worsened misinformation.

5. Political Reaction Over Strategic Governance

- The post-fire dismissal of the Fire Chief was reactive and morale-damaging.
- Leadership shifted blame rather than building reform systems.

Core State-Level Failures (All-Risk Lens)

1. Fragmented Executive Command

- No standing **Governor-led unified command** across agencies.
- Crisis leadership assembled ad hoc instead of pre-institutionalized.

2. Hazard-Specific Planning Without System Integration

- Agencies plan well inside silos (fire, quake, cyber, health).
- Failures occur at **handoffs, overlaps, and cascading impacts**.

3. Reactive Readiness Posture

- Readiness triggered after impact, not before risk thresholds.
- No mandatory, statewide pre-incident surge posture.

4. Infrastructure Blind Spots

- Water, power, communications, transportation, and data systems assessed independently—not as a single resilience ecosystem.

5. Inconsistent Public Communication

- Multiple voices, conflicting guidance, delayed clarity.
- Loss of public trust during high-stress incidents.

6. Accountability Without Execution

- After-Action Reports written but not enforced.
 - Lessons identified repeatedly—but not implemented systematically.
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III. Synthesis & Lessons for Executive Leadership

1. **Presence is Non-Negotiable.**
Leadership in crisis begins with visibility. Command cannot be delegated by absence
2. **Governance is a System, not a Personality.**
Mayoral authority must empower permanent structures of accountability that function regardless of who occupies office.
3. **Preparedness is Policy.**
Red Flag staffing, infrastructure readiness, and communication protocols must be mandated by ordinance, not optional discretion.
4. **Transparency Builds Trust.**
The public will forgive an imperfect response — but never a hidden one.
5. **Mission Completion Defines Leadership.**
Crises end not when flames are out, but when recovery, reform, and accountability are complete.

Strategic Executive Takeaways

1. **Command Requires Governance Muscle.**
A mayor must drive operational unity through codified interagency authority.
2. **Symbolism Must Yield to Systems.**
Presence matters, but permanence of systems matters more.
3. **Transparency Equals Trust.**
Information must flow as fast as fire.
4. **Institutional Learning Must Be Enforced.**
Every AAR must result in measurable, enforced policy change.
5. **Reform Requires Courage.**
The next mayor must own the failures and lead the transformation, not the deflection.

Executive Lessons for All-Risk Gubernatorial Leadership

Risk Is Constant — Governance Must Be Continuous

California must govern for disruption, not stability.

Hazards Differ — Failure Patterns Repeat

The same command, communication, and coordination gaps appear across all incident types.

Preparedness Is a Policy Choice

Readiness must be codified, auditable, and mandatory.

Trust Is an Operational Asset

Clear leadership and transparent systems reduce panic, misinformation, and secondary harm.

Completion Is Leadership

Incidents are not over when headlines fade—they end when systems are fixed.

IV. Executive-Level Adaptive Solutions

1. Institutionalize an “Adaptive Readiness Framework (ARF)”

- A. **Create a Mayoral Surge Order Authority.**” A data-driven, citywide pre-event posture matrix that links weather intelligence, staffing, and asset deployment, requiring activation 12–24 hours prior to the event. Allows the Mayor to approve augmented staffing levels based on predictive models, thereby removing budgetary constraints. Tie readiness metrics to City performance audits.

- B. **Continuity of Executive Leadership Plan.**” The Continuity of Executive Leadership Plan (CELP) **establishes the framework by which the City of Los Angeles maintains** uninterrupted executive command, policy direction, and interagency coordination during major incidents, disasters, or periods when the Mayor is unavailable or incapacitated. This plan ensures that **no emergency, crisis, or public disruption** will ever again be compounded by the absence of clear, visible leadership at City Hall.

IV. Governor-Level All-Risk Adaptive Solutions

1. Establish a Statewide Adaptive Readiness Framework (ARF)

A permanent **Governor’s Readiness Authority** governing **all hazards**, not just disasters.

Key Features

- Risk-based readiness triggers tied to:
 - Weather & climate
 - Seismic probability
 - Cyber threat levels
 - Infrastructure stress indicators
 - Public-health intelligence
- Mandatory statewide posture escalation:
 - Staffing
 - Resource staging
 - Executive briefings
- Annual readiness certification for every state agency.

Outcome:

Preparedness becomes **governance**, not discretion.

2. Establish a Unified Command Governance Board (UCGB)

The **Unified Command Governance Board (UCGB)** establishes a permanent executive coordination body to unify leadership across all critical agencies in Los Angeles during crises, major incidents, and preparedness operations.

- A. Its mission is to ensure **one city, one command, one message** — aligning policy, operations, communication, and resources under a single executive framework led by the Mayor.
- B. The UCGB is designed to **replace ad-hoc interagency coordination** with a standing, institutional command structure that bridges:
 - i. Policy leadership (City Hall)
 - ii. Operational command (LAFD, LAPD, LADWP, DOT, EMD)
 - iii. Community and external partners (County, State, and Federal)

2. Create a State Unified Command Governance Board (S-UCGB)

A standing, Governor-chaired executive body activated for **any significant all-risk event**.

Unifies

- Policy leadership (Governor’s Office)
- Operations (Cal OES, CAL FIRE, CHP, Public Health)
- Infrastructure (Energy, Water, Transportation, Technology)
- Recovery & finance
- Federal and regional partners

Mission

One State. One Command. One Operational Truth.

3. Develop a Statewide “Trusted Technology Roadmap (TTR)”

Implement a “**Critical Infrastructure Readiness Index (CIRI)**.” A mayor-level dashboard tracking citywide water, power, and communication status requires LADWP to certify redundancy before every Red Flag period.

- A. Integrate real-time situational platforms, drone imagery, and AI-fed weather data into one Common Operating Picture (COP).
- B. Implement a Performance Accountability Dashboard to track measurable metrics across readiness, communication, and response speed.
- C. Publicly post dashboards quarterly to show transparency and data-driven performance reviews.

Technology as a **decision advantage**, not a vulnerability.

All-Risk Capabilities

- Single **Common Operating Picture (COP)** integrating:
 - Natural hazards
 - Infrastructure status
 - Cyber incidents
 - Public-health metrics
- Critical Infrastructure Readiness Index:
 - Power, water, data, transportation, healthcare
- Cyber-resilience oversight and misinformation detection.

Outcome:

Leaders act on **verified reality**, not fragmented data.

4. Launch a Statewide Resilient Workforce Strategy

the **Resilient Workforce Strategy (RWS)** ensures that Los Angeles’s workforce — from first responders to city administrators — is **ready, supported, cross-trained, and sustained** to operate under prolonged emergencies and 21st-century pressures. It builds off lessons learned from the **Palisades Fire (2025)** and subsequent After-Action Reviews that revealed fatigue, staffing shortages, and qualification gaps across departments.

The **Resilient Workforce Strategy (RWS)** is a citywide framework to **recruit, develop, protect, and sustain** the people who power Los Angeles’s emergency and civic systems. It ensures that every employee — from dispatchers to disaster engineers — is equipped with the **skills, stamina, and support** to perform under crisis conditions.

Vision Statement:

“A workforce ready for every challenge — trained, supported, and resilient.”

Prepare people for **sustained, multi-hazard operations**.

Key Elements

- Cross-disciplinary training (fire, health, cyber, utilities)
- Surge staffing and fatigue mitigation
- Leadership succession depth
- Mental-health and recovery protection
- Credential reciprocity across agencies.

Outcome:

A workforce that endures prolonged crisis without breaking.

5. Reform Citywide Crisis Communications Plan & Joint Information & Intelligence Center (JIIC)

- The **Citywide Crisis Communications Reform Plan** establishes a unified, transparent, and technology-driven communication system to manage public information before, during, and after emergencies.
- Its centerpiece — the **Joint Information & Intelligence Center (JIIC)** — will serve as the **nerve center** for official messaging, media coordination, rumor control, and public intelligence analysis.
- **Vision Statement:** “One Voice. One Message. One Los Angeles.”

Reform Statewide Crisis Communications (State JIIC)

Create a **State Joint Information & Intelligence Center (S-JIIC)** for all hazards.

Functions

- Single authoritative public voice
- Real-time rumor control
- Integrated intelligence validation
- Governor-approved messaging protocols.

Outcome:

Clarity replaces confusion—trust replaces speculation.

6. Forge a Strategic Interagency Compact (SIC)

With oversight of the UCGB, the **Strategic Interagency Compact (SIC)** establishes a permanent, binding partnership between the Local, County, State, Federal, and Utility partners to ensure seamless cooperation, rapid mutual aid, and unified command during emergencies, disasters, and widespread incidents.

The Compact transforms **interagency cooperation from reactive coordination to proactive governance** — defining shared protocols, communication channels, funding responsibilities, and command authority before crises occur.

City of Los Angeles Departments:

- Fire Department (LAFD)
- Police Department (LAPD)
- Emergency Management Department (EMD)
- Department of Water and Power (LADWP)
- Department of Transportation (LADOT)
- Public Works & Bureau of Engineering
- Mayor’s Office of Public Safety (MOPS)

County and Regional Partners:

- Los Angeles County Fire Department
- Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department
- Department of Public Health
- Metro Transit Authority

State Partners:

- California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)
- California Highway Patrol (CHP)

Federal Partners:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Private and Utility Partners:

- Southern California Edison
- SoCalGas
- AT&T / Verizon Emergency Services
- Red Cross, CERT, and critical NGOs

Vision Statement: “Unified agencies. Shared resources. One mission — protecting California”

Forge a State Strategic Interagency Compact (S-SIC)

A binding **all-risk coordination compact** among:

- State agencies
- Counties and regions
- Federal partners
- Utilities and critical private operators

Purpose

- Automatic mutual aid
- Pre-approved authorities
- Unified standards across hazards.

7. Launch a Community Resilience Partnership (CRP)

- This plan operationalizes the “*community as the first line of defense*” concept — turning Los Angeles’s 4 million residents into active partners in preparedness, response, and recovery.
- It is the **final public-facing pillar** of the City’s proposed governance reform framework alongside the **Unified Command Governance Board (UCGB)**, **Joint Information & Intelligence Center (JIIC)**, and **Strategic Interagency Compact (SIC)**.
- The **Community Resilience Partnership (CRP)** creates a permanent citywide network connecting residents, local organizations, schools, and businesses directly to the City’s emergency management system.
- The goal is to **empower communities before the crisis** — ensuring neighborhoods can sustain themselves during the first 72 hours of disaster, support emergency operations, and accelerate long-term recovery.
- **Vision Statement:**
“Prepared neighborhoods. Informed residents. Resilient Los Angeles.”

8. Create a “Disaster Recovery Authority (DRA).”

- This plan addresses the severe coordination, permitting, and recovery delays exposed after the **Palisades Fire (2025)** — when rebuilding and public assistance were mired in bureaucratic red tape. The **DRA** institutionalizes *speed, transparency, and accountability* in post-disaster recovery — ensuring Los Angeles never again faces a “second disaster” of government inaction.
- The **Disaster Recovery Authority (DRA)** is a semi-autonomous, time-limited entity established to coordinate and accelerate all aspects of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction within the City of Los Angeles.
- The DRA serves as the **single point of accountability** for rebuilding homes, infrastructure, and communities after major disasters — ensuring every recovery effort is executed faster, fairer, and more transparently than ever before.
- **Mission Statement:**
“Restore Los Angeles — stronger, smarter, and faster.”

Establish a California Disaster Recovery Authority (CA-DRA)

A single authority for **all-risk recovery**, not just disasters.

- Infrastructure rebuild
- Housing and business recovery
- FEMA and federal reimbursement
- Permitting acceleration.

Outcome:

Recovery is fast, transparent, and equitable.

9. Institutionalize After-Action Integration

The **After-Action Integration (AAI) Framework** transforms the State’s emergency management culture from *reactive reflection* to *proactive reform*.

It mandates that every *After-Action Report (AAR)* — whether from a wildfire, flood, earthquake, major event, or public safety crisis — triggers a **formal governance cycle** that results in:

- Policy changes,
- Budgetary allocations,
- Departmental accountability, and
- Public reporting of measurable progress.

End the cycle of repeated failure.

- Governor-mandated AAR execution
 - Assigned executive ownership
 - Budget alignment
 - Public progress reporting.
- A. **Establish a “Post-Incident Reform Council” as an alternative to personnel actions.** Require 90-day AAR implementation plans signed by all department heads, overseen by the Governor’s UCGB, before leadership changes are considered.
- B. **Mandate an “After-Action Governance Charter.”** Every AAR finding must be assigned an executive owner, budget code, and completion timeline; progress reported quarterly to the City Council’s Public Safety Committee.

Vision Statement:

“Every crisis teaches — but only institutionalized learning prevents the next one.”

10. Champion a “Mission Completion” Culture

The **Mission Completion Culture Initiative (MCCI)** establishes a new standard of leadership and execution across the City of Los Angeles: Every plan, every project, every emergency — **finished, verified, and publicly accountable.**

This initiative embeds completion discipline into all levels of city governance, from field operations to executive decision-making. It ensures that **no task ends at “good enough,” no incident closes without verification, and no reform fades without results.**

Create a citywide digital platform designed to **track, verify, and certify completion** of all major projects and emergency missions.

Vision Statement:

“Start with clarity. Execute with urgency. Finish with accountability.”

No incident closes until:

- Systems are restored
- Policies corrected
- Accountability verified
- Communities stabilized.

Leadership Principle

Starting fast is competence. Finishing strong is leadership.

V. State Executive Implementation Schedule (All-Risk)

Phase	Timeline	Focus	Lead
Stabilize	0–90 Days	Establish S-UCGB, Readiness Authority	Governor
Integrate	3–6 Months	COP, S-JIIC, Workforce Surge	Cal OES / CIO
Institutionalize	6–12 Months	CA-DRA, AAI, CRP	Governor / Legislature
Sustain	Year 2+	Annual State of Resilience Report	Governor / Controller

The Palisades Fire exposed more than operational weakness — it revealed a crisis of confidence in how Los Angeles governs itself under pressure.

“Leadership is not about where the crisis starts — it’s about where the recovery begins.”

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America’s Crisis Manager

Recognize. Respond. Resolve.