

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (US&R)

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The catastrophic earthquakes that hit Mexico City in 1985 and Soviet Armenia in 1988 underscored the need for specially trained urban search and rescue (US&R) resources to respond to incidents of structural collapse caused by earthquakes or other emergency events.

The October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake caused collapses of the Cypress section of the Nimitz Freeway in Oakland, and structural collapses in San Francisco and Santa Cruz. In late 1989, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) developed a comprehensive proposal outlining a three-year program to enhance urban search and rescue capabilities in California. The cornerstone of this program is to be the development of multi-disciplinary urban search and rescue task forces which will be deployed by OES to rescue victims of large-scale disasters.

At the same time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) began an initiative to upgrade US&R capabilities nationwide, and developed the first coordinated, national USAR network for catastrophic disasters. The national program is based upon the model developed in California. FEMA has now sponsored 25 Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Task Forces across the nation. Each Task Force is made up of 56 members, who are specially trained and equipped to perform the required Search, Rescue, Medical, and Technical functions.

California has eight USAR Type I Task Forces, strategically located throughout the state. The Riverside City Task Force is comprised of 31 CDF personnel from Riverside County. The USAR Task Forces are sponsored by the following fire agencies:

- Los Angeles City Fire
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- Menlo Park Fire Protection District
- Oakland City Fire
- Orange County Fire
- Riverside City Fire
- Sacramento City Fire
- San Diego City Fire

The USAR Task Forces are designed to be totally self-sufficient for the first 72 hours of an operation, and are capable of sustaining a 10-day mission. Specialized equipment caches for the Task Force include concrete and steel cutting tools, breaking devices, portable generators, air compressors, power saws, drills, air bags, floodlights, ropes and other technical rescue items, medical supplies, hazardous materials and radiation monitors, protective clothing, victim locating devices, search cameras, and portable computers. The Task Forces can be mobilized within six hours to depart for operations anywhere in California and the United States or its territories.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) is responsible for the overall management and coordination of the state and federal USAR Response System. OES coordination is provided by the Urban Search and Rescue Program, which is part of the OES Fire and Rescue Division. OES is the point of contact for mobilization and mission assignments for the eight Task Forces.

OES is responsible for the accounting of federal and state funds obligated for the development of the USAR Response System, and for the equipping and training of the Task Forces. OES administers several FEMA grant programs that support the Task Forces.

In addition, CDF also participates in numerous Type I, Type II, and Type III USAR Rescue Task Forces. Model 18 Fire Engines, when equipped to complement, will be USAR Type III.

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