

# As Blazes Rage, California's Firefighting Bill Soars

Scott Detrow | September 19, 2014

• Share:

- 
- 
- 
- 



Firefighters battle the King Fire near the town of Pollock Pines earlier this week. (Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

California is on pace to exceed its annual wildfire-fighting budget less than three months into the fiscal year. This year's budget allocated \$209 million to [Cal Fire's](#) emergency



fund. Through Thursday, the agency had spent \$191 million.

The state projects how much money it will need for wildfires based on a rolling average of how much it spent over the previous five years. A decade ago, that total was about \$90 million. Now it's consistently over \$200 million. Cal Fire officials blame drought conditions for the steep increase.

"Oftentimes that won't be enough," said Cal Fire Chief Deputy Director Janet Barentson. "Depending on the year — and this is going to be one of those years — we're going to exceed this amount."

Barentson said the main cost is always personnel. "It's the overtime costs for folks that are working 12 or 24 hour shifts out on a fire," she said.

After that, the agency spends a lot of money on equipment rentals and the steep cost of fueling and flying its aircraft.

Now, to be clear, Cal Fire isn't going to have to shut down when it taps out its annual budget — which will likely happen next week. The state can always tap into its contingency fund, and Cal Fire has authority to spend what it needs to stay on top of blazes around the state.

**Explore:** [Cal Fire](#), [Janet Barentson](#), [King Fire](#), [Wildfire](#)

**Category:** [News](#)

**KQED** PUBLIC MEDIA FOR  
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA Copyright © 2014 KQED Inc. All Rights Reserved. | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#)