



**PORTLAND
FIRE & RESCUE**



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SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 2484

Oregon is no stranger to natural disasters, with its volatile weather patterns and the constant threat of earthquakes. As a result, it is crucial for the state to have a strong, local fire service response that can quickly and effectively mitigate the impact of these all-hazard public safety threats. However, the current state of Oregon's urban search and rescue (USAR) resources is inadequate, leaving many residents vulnerable to the dangers posed by natural disasters and other emergencies.

To address this issue, the Oregon fire service is seeking state funding to establish a robust USAR program that will provide the technical rescue capability needed to support the state's emergency response efforts. This program would require start-up funding, annual training investment, and capital investment in state training facilities to support an organized long-term capability that is currently lacking in the Oregon fire service.

The need for a state USAR program is urgent, as public safety threats that require a USAR response are increasing in frequency and severity. Erratic weather due to climate change, aging state infrastructure, the threat of severe earthquakes to the region, and other all-hazard public safety threats all require a technical rescue capability that the state does not currently have. A state USAR program, managed by the Oregon State Fire Marshal, would help mitigate these threats and ensure that the state is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies.

Currently, only a few state fire departments have qualified USAR responders, which is insufficient to meet the needs of the state. As a result, the state cannot adequately prepare for and respond to the increasing threats posed by natural disasters and other emergencies. Moreover, a request today for additional USAR resources to the Oregon State Fire Marshal would be ad-hoc and lack state legislative support, funding, legal authority, and logistical support. This would greatly inhibit an efficient, effective response to those in need.

The earthquake threat to Oregon is compounded by the prevalence of unreinforced masonry buildings (URM) throughout the state. These buildings, which are common in many of the state's older communities, pose a significant risk in the event of an earthquake. Incidentally, my own community has over 1800 URM commercial and apartment buildings. The resulting damage would require a significant USAR response to the affected areas, something the state is currently ill-equipped to handle. Oregon cannot rely solely on a rapid federal USAR response from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While FEMA provides USAR teams, the time to get these teams into position throughout Oregon will take weeks in the event of a serious earthquake. Our state must demonstrate preparedness and develop the resilient capacity to support one another immediately after the need is identified. With a robust state USAR program, Oregon would have the capability to respond quickly to emergencies, saving lives and minimizing the damage caused by these all-hazard public safety threats.

In conclusion, the Oregon legislature should pass legislation to develop state funding for an urban search and rescue program managed by the Oregon State Fire Marshal Office. Such a program is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of Oregon's residents. The increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters and other all-hazard public safety threats require a long-term, much-needed technical rescue



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capability that the Oregon fire service currently lacks. Legislative action would provide start-up funding, annual training investment, and capital investment in state training facilities to support an organized long-term state USAR program and capability that will mitigate the impact of all-hazard public safety threats. With the establishment of such a robust state USAR program, Oregon would be better prepared to respond to emergencies, ensuring the safety of its residents, reducing the damage caused by natural disasters, and be emblematic of the Oregon spirit of helping one another in our time of need.

Sincerely,

Chris Barney
Deputy Chief of Emergency Operations, C-Shift
Portland Fire & Rescue