



## Emergencies Relevant to Tribes in California

August 31, 2016

### What is an emergency?

An emergency is a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action. Emergencies can happen without warning and can force people to evacuate their homes or communities. Emergencies can also lead to loss of life.<sup>1</sup>

### How are American Indian tribes affected by emergencies?

Emergencies can affect American Indian tribes in many ways. For example, due to varied climate and terrain, tribes in California are often at unique risk for natural emergencies, such as wild fires, floods, and earthquakes. Additionally, many tribal lands in California are located in remote and rural locations, far from major hospitals.<sup>2</sup> Emergencies can also impact or damage tribes' cultural and natural resources, including sacred and historic sites, which are ancestral connections to the land.

### What emergencies are relevant to tribes in California?

Representatives from 83 tribes in California provided information about the types of emergencies relevant to them. Representatives reported being concerned about both natural and non-natural emergencies, ranging from fires and floods to violence and road blockages. See Table 1.

---

<sup>1</sup> Preparing for Emergencies (2015). Fact Sheet J. Injury and Illness Prevention Programs. Retrieved from: [https://www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/WOSHTEP/iipp/Materials/Factsheet\\_J\\_Preparing\\_for\\_Emergencies-1030.pdf](https://www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/WOSHTEP/iipp/Materials/Factsheet_J_Preparing_for_Emergencies-1030.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Indian health program-emergency preparedness public private partnership California. (n.d.) retrieved from: [https://www.fema.gov/pdf/privatesector/ca\\_ps\\_tribal.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/pdf/privatesector/ca_ps_tribal.pdf)

**Table 1. Emergencies Relevant to Tribes in California**

| Natural Emergencies   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wild fires, grass fires, and house fires</li> <li>• Floods, winter floods, flash floods, and dam breaks</li> <li>• Earthquakes</li> <li>• Tsunamis</li> <li>• Landslides</li> <li>• Mudslides</li> <li>• Tornadoes</li> <li>• Volcanic eruptions</li> <li>• Drought</li> <li>• General environmental concerns</li> <li>• Thunderstorms and lightning</li> <li>• Inclement weather</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat stress</li> <li>• Cold stress</li> <li>• Blue-green algae</li> <li>• Algae bloom</li> <li>• Tree mortality</li> <li>• Poor air quality from fires</li> <li>• Lacking or reduced water rights</li> <li>• Low water levels</li> <li>• Poor air quality</li> <li>• Winds and windstorms</li> <li>• Snow</li> <li>• El Niño</li> </ul>  |
| Non-Natural Emergencies   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical violence, domestic violence</li> <li>• Gun violence and weapons</li> <li>• Bomb threats</li> <li>• Terrorism and bioterrorism</li> <li>• Drug and alcohol abuse</li> <li>• Suicide</li> <li>• Unintentional accidents and injuries</li> <li>• Fatal accidents</li> <li>• H1N1 Virus</li> <li>• Bacteria from dead animals</li> <li>• Salmonella</li> <li>• Pandemics</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snake bites</li> <li>• Relocation of displaced people</li> <li>• Evacuations</li> <li>• Search and rescue operations</li> <li>• Electrical failures</li> <li>• Power outages</li> <li>• Chemical spills</li> <li>• Road blockages and road closures</li> <li>• Single access roads and outdated roads</li> <li>• Shortage of medication and/or medical supplies</li> <li>• Harm to cultural and/or natural resources</li> <li>• Economic jeopardy</li> </ul> |

### **How can policymakers and other stakeholders use this information to support tribes in California before, during, and after emergencies?**

Policymakers and stakeholders should recognize the diversity of emergencies relevant to tribes in California and provide support to tribes before, during, and after emergencies. Policymakers and other stakeholders should change state laws to recognize tribal governments as sovereign nations, which would help tribes access state funding for emergencies and formulate successful government-to-government relationships with counties. Support to tribes should also involve technical assistance and funding for the development of tribe-specific emergency operations plans and cross-jurisdictional sharing arrangements between tribes and counties.

### **Acknowledgements**

This document was developed by Maureen Wimsatt, PhD, MSW, and Michael Mudgett, MPH, from the California Tribal Epidemiology Center, housed within the California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc. Support for this document was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (72458). The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.