



PA 19-37—sHB 5455

Public Safety and Security Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING QUALIFIED FOREST FIRE FIGHTERS

SUMMARY: This act designates the state forest fire warden as the sole authority who may add supplementary state forest fire control personnel to assist with extinguishing a forest fire in the state. Under prior law, state forest fire control personnel and state forest fire warden-appointed patrol personnel could summon assistance.

The act specifically allows the state forest fire warden to add qualified, temporary emergency workers to the state forest fire control personnel. It also eliminates prior law's (1) authorization to summon any state resident adult under age 50 and (2) provisions that allow state forest fire control personnel to requisition private property for fire-fighting purposes.

The act makes several conforming changes relating to summoned residents, including removing (1) state workers' compensation benefits for those who assisted and (2) fines for those who refused or neglected to assist or to allow use of their property. It extends the same workers' compensation benefits to the temporary emergency workers and requires the Department of Administrative Services to assist the state forest fire warden in developing appropriate classifications for these workers.

The act also makes other technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2019

ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL FOR FIGHTING FOREST FIRES

Prior law authorized state forest fire control personnel and state forest fire warden-appointed patrol personnel to (1) summon any state resident aged between 18 and 50 to assist in extinguishing forest fires and (2) requisition equipment, motor vehicles, and other property for the same purpose. Summoned persons were to be fined up to \$200 if they were physically able but (1) refused or neglected to assist or to allow use of their property or (2) willfully interfered with or hindered certain persons of authority. The act eliminates these provisions.

Under the act, if the state forest fire warden determines that additional personnel are required to extinguish a forest fire in the state, she may add "temporary emergency workers" who meet specified training and qualification requirements to the state forest fire control personnel. These workers must specifically be trained and qualified under the National Incident Management System: Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide published by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group.

BACKGROUND

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

State Forest Fire Warden

By law, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection commissioner is the state forest fire warden (CGS § 23-33). The warden's powers include, among other things, the authority to enter into agreements with federal agencies, cities, boroughs, fire districts, and forest protective associations to prevent and control forest fires. The warden may also employ volunteer fire companies for assisting in fighting forest fires and must establish compensation rates for equipment usage, fire-fighting materials and supplies, and volunteer company firefighter and laborer time (CGS § 23-36).