

Calif. fire officials request \$100M to fix mutual-aid system



South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston testifying Feb. 27 in Sacramento before legislators. Photo/Provided

By Melody Gutierrez, San Francisco Chronicle

SACRAMENTO – California fire officials asked lawmakers Tuesday for \$100 million to improve the state's strained mutual-aid system, which is designed to quickly rally first responders in an emergency, such as the deadly fires that ravaged the North Bay last year.

At a legislative hearing in Sacramento, fire chiefs and emergency officials said wildfires across the state last year exposed shortcomings in the 60-year-old system.

"The system is a little too slow to react sometimes, and you are really starting to see it in these instances where a fire is moving so fast that you can't keep up," said Santa Rosa Fire Chief Tony Gossner, who battled one of the quickest moving and most destructive fires last year, the Tubbs Fire. "The system worked great in the '50s, '60s and '70s. In

today's world, the last three or four years have shown it is too slow."

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