

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Workers and Employers Affected by Fire Disasters Now Eligible for Special Unemployment Benefits and Tax Extensions

SACRAMENTO – Workers and employers directly affected by the Southern California wildfires fires will be eligible for a variety of benefits, thanks to a rapid response to the disaster by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the federal government, and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency's Employment Development Department (EDD).

At the request of Governor Schwarzenegger, President Bush has made Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) available to those impacted by the fires as part of a major disaster declaration for several Southern California counties (currently Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Orange, and Riverside counties). While DUA is similar to regular Unemployment Insurance (UI) in benefit amounts and duration, eligibility is somewhat different.

Those eligible for DUA include people affected by the disaster who have a legal right to work in the United States; who are or have been self-employed, or who are unable to establish a valid regular UI claim; or individuals who have exhausted their UI claim benefits. People unable to reach work because of the disaster; those scheduled to begin work that was terminated because of the fires; and people physically unable to work because of a disaster-incurred injury may also be eligible.

The availability of DUA is in addition to other action taken by Governor Schwarzenegger to assist workers and employers affected by the fires. Thanks to an executive order waiving the one-week waiting period for UI benefits for workers who lost their jobs in this disaster, those workers will be able to start receiving those benefits a little faster.

In California, both DUA and UI claims are processed through the Employment Development Department. In addition, for employers affected by the fires, EDD is offering a 60-day extension to file their state payroll reports and to deposit state payroll taxes with the department without penalty or interest.

"Whenever disaster strikes, EDD steps up," EDD Director Patrick Henning said. "The EDD family considers it not only a duty but an honor to come to the aid of the workers and businesses whose lives and livelihoods have been disrupted by these wildfires. Our Unemployment Insurance staff has already prepared special procedures to ensure that workers receive their benefit checks promptly. In addition, our Tax Branch staff is relaxing its requirements for employers who are struggling to get their businesses up and running again. They will now have extra time to file tax reports and to deposit tax payments."

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For Employees Affected by the Fire

As a result of the governor’s waiver of the one-week waiting period for UI benefits, claimants will receive two weeks worth of benefits in their first check instead of one week. The waiting period will be waived on all Southern California wildfire-related UI claims beginning with those filed during the period beginning November 18, 2008 and ending on the close of business on December 18, 2008.

The fastest and easiest option for individuals to file claims for UI benefits is on-line at <https://eapply4ui.edd.ca.gov/> . Claimants can also file by telephone (phone numbers are listed below).

UI Claim Filing Telephone Numbers:

- English..... 1-800-300-5616
- Spanish..... 1-800-326-8937
- Cantonese..... 1-800-547-3506
- Mandarin..... .. 1-866-303-0706
- Vietnamese..... 1-800-547-2058
- TTY (non-voice)..... 1-800-815-9387

For Employers Affected by the Fires

California employers affected by the fires may request an extension up to 60 days to file their state payroll reports and to deposit state payroll taxes with EDD, without penalty or interest. The extension is granted under Section 1111.5 of the California Unemployment Insurance Code (CUIC).

State payroll taxes include Unemployment Insurance, Employment Training Tax, State Disability Insurance, and California Personal Income Tax. Written requests for an extension must be received by EDD within 60 days from the original delinquent date of the payment or return to file/pay.

To request an extension, employers must send EDD a letter specifically requesting an extension of time under Section 1111.5 of the CUIC, along with the previously unfiled report(s) and payment(s). The letter also must provide detailed information as to why the report or payment could not be submitted in a timely manner.

Employers should mail the letter and tax report or payment to the address specified on their filing form. If an employer has already been charged a late filing or payment penalty that he/she believes may qualify for this extension, the employer should send a written request to:

EDD
P.O. Box 826846, MIC 3A
Sacramento, CA 94246-0001

For further information, visit EDD’s Web site or call the EDD Taxpayer Assistance Center at 1-888-745-3886.

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