School
Rio Grande City High School

Senate Committee
N/A

Senate Author
Luis Mijares

House Committee
State Affairs

House Authors
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Diego Guerra

Lobbyist
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Emergency Equipment Database Act

HB 24

Bill Analysis

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

In 2024, wildfires in the Texas Panhandle, the largest in state history, burned over a million acres of land. Due to the Panhandle's rural nature, many jurisdictions in the region can rely heavily on volunteer fire departments (VFD). However, the author has informed the committee that there is a current lack of coordination between the state government and VFDs, which can lead to both slow wildfire responses and a lack of equipment for VFDs to effectively fight wildfires. Additionally, there is currently no outward facing statewide system in place to track the real-time status and location of fire departments' firefighting equipment. In the Texas House of Representatives Investigative Committee on the Panhandle Wildfires 2024 report to the house, the committee recommended that the Texas Forest Service consider options to enhance its current firefighting equipment tracking. This bill seeks to remedy these issues and satisfy the committee's recommendation by requiring the Texas Forest Service to create and maintain a statewide firefighting equipment database.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

This bill amends the Education Code to require the Texas Forest Service to create and maintain a comprehensive database that shows in real time the statewide inventory of firefighting equipment that is available for use in responding to wildfires. The bill requires the database to include the following information:

- a description of the type of firefighting equipment each fire department in Texas has available for use in responding to wildfires; and
- contact information for the fire department that has the equipment.

The database must be searchable by location and equipment type, be accessible by all fire departments in Texas, and allow each fire department to update the information in the database regarding the equipment the department has available. The bill requires the Texas Forest Service to do the following:

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• assist a fire department that provides equipment information to the database in updating the database annually or as soon as practicable after any change in the availability of the department's firefighting equipment; and

• use an electronic notification system to remind fire departments, at least once each calendar year, to update the availability of the department's firefighting equipment.

For these purposes, the bill defines "fire department" as a volunteer fire department or a department of a municipality, county, or special district or authority that provides firefighting services.

EFFECTIVE DATE
January 1, 2027.