

H.935 As Introduced (HGOMA Committee Bill)

Section by Section Summary

Sec. 1 – Adds 20 V.S.A. § 52 to establish the Ready Response Grant Program.

- The Ready Response Grant Program is created to authorize the Division of Emergency Management to award an annual grant to an eligible food bank to source, store, and distribute shelf-stable, ready-to-eat foods and bottled water.
- The amount of a grant shall be sufficient to ensure that the food and water is appropriately stored, cycled, staged, and distributed pursuant to an MOU with the Division.
- Food and water shall be redistributed by the grantee through qualifying nonprofits that provide food to individuals in Vermont.

Sec. 2 – Adds 20 V.S.A. § 53 to establish the Technical Rescue Grant Program.

- The Technical Rescue Grant Program is created to authorize the Department of Public Safety to issue grants:
 - of not more than \$5,000.00 per grant, totaling not more than \$25,000.00 annually;
 - to fire departments, emergency medical services agencies, and technical rescue agencies operating within Vermont;
 - for purposes of improving operational readiness, investing in specialized equipment and personal protective gear, and providing first responders with technical rescue training.
- This section establishes a Technical Rescue Grant Working Group to review applications and recommend awards under the Grant Program. The Working Group is composed of 5 members:
 - the Manager of the Vermont Urban Search and Rescue Team;
 - one member of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, appointed by the Committee on Committees;
 - one member of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
 - a representative of a fire department, appointed by the Commissioner of Public Safety; and
 - a representative of an emergency medical services agency, appointed by the Commissioner of Health.
- The Manager of USAR shall call the first meeting of the Working Group. At its first meeting, the Working Group shall elect a chair and a vice chair.

- DPS is granted APA authority to adopt procedures governing applicant review and scoring. The Department is also required to collect reports from grant recipients concerning the use of the grant funds and provide a consolidated written report to HGOMA and SGO concerning the use of grant funds under the Program.

Sec. 3 – [Deleted.]

Sec. 4 – Amends 20 V.S.A. § 6 to ensure that disability-led organizations and individuals with lived disability experience are included in the planning processes conducted by regional emergency management committees.

- Subdivisions (c)(3) and (4) are amended to expressly include disability-led organizations in the list of entities that should be included when the Division advises municipal emergency planning organizations on shelter siting and training under the local emergency plan.
- Subdivision (d)(3)(A) is amended to require that each regional emergency management committee include a voting member who is an individual with lived disability experience representing a disability-led organization, appointed by the Vermont Council for Independent Living.

Sec. 5 – Amends 20 V.S.A. § 32 to require all local emergency planning committees to include representatives from organizations serving vulnerable populations and to coordinate with disability-led organizations throughout all phases of emergency management planning.

Sec. 6 – Amends 20 V.S.A. § 51 to require, if feasible, that any emergency and weather alert system used by a municipality include communication channels that are accessible by individuals with disabilities.

Secs. 7 through 11 – Amend various sections within Titles 10 and 20 to modernize the statutes related to the State Forest Fire Warden, town forest fire wardens, and special forest fire wardens.

- Sec. 7 amends 10 V.S.A. § 2603 to authorize the Commissioner of Forests, Parks, and Recreation as the State Forest Fire Warden to:
 - exercise town forest fire warden duties;
 - appoint special forest fire wardens and delegate duties to those wardens;
 - take command over forest fire response in any municipality, unorganized town, or gore;
 - delegate authority to act as incident commander of a forest fire to another person;
 - serve on the Northeastern Forest Fire Protection Commission;
 - enter into mutual aid compacts pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 2642; and
 - issue a ban on kindling fire permits on lands owned by ANR.

- Sec. 8 amends 10 V.S.A. chapter 83, subchapter 4 (forest fire prevention) in its entirety to update the statutes related to town forest fire wardens. Within this subchapter:
 - § 2641 is amended to state that the chief of the fire department, fire district, or private fire department with the jurisdictional responsibility to respond to a municipality, unorganized town, or gore is designated as the town forest fire warden.
 - This section is also amended to allow the town forest fire warden to appoint deputies and to clarify that a municipality that does not receive services from any fire department may contract to have a neighboring municipality's fire chief serve as the town forest fire warden.
 - § 2642 is amended to repeal the specific \$30 annual pay and \$30 training per diem that town forest fire wardens received from the Commissioner of FPR.
 - § 2643 is amended to clarify that municipalities may be reimbursed for the costs of fire suppression services when funds are appropriated or are otherwise available for that purpose. This section is also amended to establish express reporting criteria that must be met by a municipality in order to qualify for reimbursement of fire suppression costs.
 - § 2644 is amended to establish reporting requirements for town forest fire wardens and to require the issuance of a written permit to kindle fire whenever the town forest fire warden authorizes the kindling of a fire under the section authorizing open burns.
 - § 2645 is amended to clarify that a town forest fire warden may impose conditions on the issuance of a permit to kindle fire. This section is also amended to state that a special forest fire warden has the authority to issue permits to kindle category 3 fires on lands owned by ANR.
 - § 2645 is further amended to state that the Commissioner's discretionary authority concerning permits to kindle fire includes the power to prohibit or restrict category 1, 2, or 3 fires. This section defines the following:
 - "category 1" fire to mean fires 36 inches in diameter or less that are built in stone arches, outdoor fireplaces, or existing fire rings or 36 inches in diameter or less built in a location that is 200 feet or more from any forestland, or field containing dry grass or other flammable plant materials contiguous to forestland.
 - "category 2" fire to mean natural wood fires in piles larger than 36 inches in diameter; or 36 inches in diameter or less, not built in stone arches, outdoor fireplaces, or existing fire rings at State

recreational areas, other public recreational areas, or on private property.

- “category 3” fire to mean fires applied to existing vegetation in a predetermined land area, in a manner to meet specific or prescribed objectives, including fuels management, slash abatement, firefighter training, agricultural field burning, forest management, wildlife habitat management, or introduced species management.
- § 2645 is also amended to clarify that “natural wood” does not mean wood, brush, weeds, or grass if they have been altered in any way by surface applications or injections of paints, stains, preservatives, oils, glues, or pesticides.
- § 2646 contains technical corrections.
- § 2647 is amended to remove the time specific prohibition of kindling fires on the forestland of another person without permission. This section now generally prohibits kindling fires on another person’s forestland without permission of the owner.
- § 2648 is amended to define “slash” for purposes of the provisions governing slash removal. “slash” means branches, tree tops, and other woody debris left on the forest floor after logging.
- Sec. 9 – Repeals the subchapter governing the uniform fire prevention ticket.
 - This subchapter allowed the Superior Court to establish the uniform form to be used for a ticket issued by the fire warden for a fire prevention offense. Tickets are issued by the fire warden for a violation of the subchapters governing forest fire prevention.
- Sec. 10 – Amends 20 V.S.A. § 2673 to conform that section to the updates to the town forest fire warden amendments.
- Sec. 11 – Amends 20 V.S.A. § 2992 to eliminate references to the uniform fire prevention ticket subchapter that is repealed by Sec. 9 of this bill.
- Sec. 12 – Contains session law to authorize the Department of Public Safety to use monies appropriated or held in reserve pursuant to procure and implement a multidisciplinary computer-aided dispatch system for public safety communications.
 - This authority is subject to conditions and benchmarks set out in subdivisions (1) to (3).
 - This section also clarifies the duration of existence, duties, and compensation of the Public Safety Communications Task Force.

- NOTE: this section of the HGOMA report is proposed to be amended by the H.App. report.
- Sec. 13 – Contains five appropriations:
 - \$70,163.00 to the Agency of Administration for purposes of supporting the creation of State emergency and all-hazards response and preparedness materials in 15 languages;
 - \$720,000.00 to the Department of Public Safety for the purpose of supporting the Urban Search and Rescue Team;
 - \$25,000.00 to the Department of Public Safety for the purpose of awarding grants from the Technical Rescue Grant Program;
 - \$540,000.00 to the Office of the Secretary of State for the purpose of supporting Vermont Access Network current operations and programming; and
 - \$1,000,000.00 to the Department of Public Safety for the Ready Response Grant Program.
 - NOTE: this section of the HGOMA report is proposed to be amended by the H.App. report.
- Sec. 14 – Effective date is July 1, 2026.