

# California Creates Cabinet Post to Manage Volunteers



Jim Wilson/The New York Times

Over 2,000 people responded to a 2007 oil spill in San Francisco Bay, but many could not help.

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LOS ANGELES — [California](#) is a state with frequent natural disasters and vast numbers of people who want to help. But Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) says a recent oil spill in San Francisco Bay helped demonstrate that “volunteerism can be moved a notch.”

To that end, Mr. Schwarzenegger is creating a cabinet-level office for volunteer management, which his administration says is the first such state cabinet position in the country. He is scheduled to announce the move on Tuesday in Los Angeles.

Under the change, the governor’s commission for volunteerism, California Volunteers, will maintain its staffing and budget. But its executive director will gain expanded duties as a cabinet secretary, playing a role in disaster-related planning and response efforts and coordinating volunteers at disaster sites.

The office will also manage donations that flow into the state for disaster relief, a responsibility now held by the state’s Office of Emergency Response. It is the first time a governor’s commission

overseeing federal money to manage volunteers — panels required by law since 1993 — has been elevated to a cabinet role.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Schwarzenegger said recent disasters had demonstrated that volunteers were “many times unable to do the kind of work they want to for the state because we are not as organized as we can be.”

He said his wife, [Maria Shriver](#), who is the honorary chairwoman of California Volunteers, helped make the case for giving the office greater prominence and responsibility.

“I have a father-in-law and mother-in-law who have relied on volunteers their whole life,” Mr. Schwarzenegger said, referring to R. Sargent Shriver, the first director of the [Peace Corps](#), and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of the Special Olympics. “It is something I am very familiar with.”

California, like many states, relies on volunteers in natural disasters and other emergencies. The state, always on earthquake watch, is also prone to wildfires and mudslides. Last fall, over 10,000 residents registered to volunteer in San Diego during the wildfires, and \$23 million in private donations poured into the state.

But when 2,000 people showed up to help after the San Francisco oil spill, “they had good intentions but didn’t know what to do with them,” said Karen Baker, the head of California Volunteers, who will become the new secretary for service and volunteering.

The various California agency heads, Ms. Baker said, “didn’t have a fellow cabinet member to talk to them, and so the governor finally called me and said, ‘Get down here with me.’ It was chaos. There were monks who got arrested.”

The state is also facing a budget crisis, with a deficit of billions of dollars. Part of the role of the elevated office will be to drum up more private and corporate money for volunteerism efforts.

**“We have no illusions of this being a substitute for government,” said Daniel Zingale, Ms. Shriver’s chief of staff and a senior adviser to the governor. “But we do believe there is a role for citizen engagement during tough budget times.”**