

# NEWS RELEASE

CAL FIRE SAN LUIS OBISPO UNIT

Unit Chief  
John Owens



June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS HONORED WITH GOVERNOR'S STATE EMPLOYEE MEDAL OF VALOR

**SACRAMENTO, CA** — Four CAL FIRE employees that work in San Luis Obispo County have been awarded the Governor's State Employee Medal of Valor, the highest honor bestowed upon California state employees for acts of extraordinary heroism performed at great personal risk.

The awards recognize actions that go far beyond the normal call of duty and exemplify the highest standards of public service.

Battalion Chief Chad Fleming received the Gold Medal of Valor for his actions on the Gifford Fire on August 1, 2025. While assigned to the incident along Highway 166, Fleming rescued a civilian who was running down the highway while engulfed in flames. The victim suffered significant second- and third-degree burns. Fleming's decisive actions provided critical aid during a life-threatening emergency.

Fire Captains Clint Marsalek, Carlos Pacheco, and Andrew Perez were also awarded the Gold Medal of Valor as part of a group recognition for a rescue that occurred on January 9, 2023, in Avila Beach. While participating in swift water rescue training during a severe winter storm that impacted San Luis Obispo County, the crew responded to an emergency and successfully rescued eight individuals from dangerous floodwaters.

The Governor's State Employee Medal of Valor recognizes California employees who demonstrate exceptional courage and selflessness while protecting the lives of others. Recipients were formally honored during a ceremony in Sacramento on June 12, 2026.

*"These awards reflect the dedication, professionalism, and courage displayed by our personnel when confronted with extraordinary circumstances," said Unit Chief John Owens. "While these firefighters are being recognized for specific emergency incidents, they also exemplify the character and commitment to service that every one of our firefighters strives to demonstrate day in and day out, and we are proud of their example."*

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