



COORDINATED RECOVERY AND REBUILDING LOS ANGELES' COMMUNITIES POST-WILDFIRE: STRATEGIES, RESOURCES, AND EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS

**FROM A CALL TO ACTION BY
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SELECTED QUOTES FROM RESPONDANTS

"Our home burned down in the Eaton Fire. Was it the fault of policymakers and SCE? At the moment, that is unimportant to me. In the longer term assessment of what happened to 12,000 homeowners and business owners like me, it matters a great deal. We live in a suburb of Altadena miles from wildlands. This is still surreal and unimaginable for us. It's too soon to be able to explain things in logical terms. How do I feel about our loss? It is devastating however it provokes our resilience and focuses me on next steps."

"I'm conflicted with feelings of deep empathy for those who have lost everything. At the same time, I think about the inequity in the situation with some people using private firefighters, and the fact that many of these people can afford to stay in AIRBNBs for the next 6 months and other forced to leave the state. The impacts on the rental market will also be immediate and inequitable."

"The situation is devastating and horrifying. I would like to use my expertise as a physician with expertise in integrative health, stress management and designing spaces for wellbeing to help."

"While there is loss of life and massive destruction, the fires could be a catalyst for significant reforms in the way we plan and implement and manage infrastructure and land development."

"This is a tragedy that will linger in the living memory of Southern California for a generation. Whether it is the event that finally catalyzed a shift towards more sustainable and resilient community building, or is to be a harbinger of worse disasters, depends on how planners and policymakers at all levels respond."



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since January 7, 2025, Los Angeles County has faced devastating wildfires, including the Palisades Fire and the Eaton Fire in Altadena. These fires have destroyed approximately 12,000 structures and displaced thousands residents. The economic impact is estimated in the billions encompassing property loss, business closures, and the costs of emergency response and recovery. The environmental damage is severe, with critical wildlife habitats destroyed, soil erosion risks, and air quality significantly degraded. Socially, these fires have disrupted lives, uprooted families, and strained community networks, especially in marginalized neighborhoods.

In the short term, efforts must focus on providing immediate relief to displaced residents, restoring essential services, and addressing mental health needs. Long-term challenges include rebuilding homes and infrastructure to current fire-resistant standards, implementing equitable resource distribution, and developing sustainable land-use policies to reduce future risks.

This report synthesizes expert feedback and recommendations to guide recovery efforts and ensure a resilient future for affected communities in Los Angeles County.



INTRODUCTION

Context

The wildfires have devastated California communities, displacing thousands, destroying critical infrastructure, and causing economic and emotional stress. Beyond immediate recovery, these events remind us about the urgent need for systemic changes in planning, resource management, and community resilience.

Purpose

This report aims to:

- Coordinate multi-disciplinary expertise to support recovery efforts.
- Provide actionable recommendations for rebuilding and resilience.
- Highlight resources and best practices for mitigating future disasters.



SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

1. Immediate Response and Recovery

Recovery efforts should prioritize mental health support, temporary housing solutions, and equitable resource distribution. Professional and volunteer assistance is essential to navigate permitting and rebuilding while avoiding predatory land acquisitions.

Key Points:

- Provide mental health, trauma, and grief counseling for affected communities.
- Expedite permitting for interim housing solutions, such as RVs and temporary structures, clustered near utilities and transportation.
- Establish a volunteer corps of planners, engineers, and officials to offer free or low-cost assistance for rebuilding and permitting processes.
- Ensure the land remains locally owned by supporting families financially to avoid forced sales to opportunistic buyers.
- Allocate immediate resources equitably, focusing on vulnerable populations like immigrant laborers and low-income families.

2. Rebuilding Principles and Standards

Rebuilding should integrate resilience, fire safety, and sustainability while emphasizing community well-being and up to date building codes.

Key Points:

- Adopt a "build back better" approach, focusing on resilience rather than simply restoring pre-disaster conditions.
- Require modern fire-resistant building standards (e.g., California Building Code Chapter 7A).
- Encourage defensible space mandates, use of non-combustible materials, and fire-resistant retrofitting.
- Ensure rebuilding incorporates sustainability, physical health, and emotional well-being principles.



3. Urban Planning and Land Use

Urban planning must prioritize fire-resistant designs, larger buffer zones, and managed retreats while incorporating data-driven models and expert advice.

Key Points:

- Reassess land use patterns in fire-prone areas, considering managed retreats and fire-resistant urban designs.
- Create firebreaks, buffer zones, and larger lot sizes for defensible space.
- Develop advanced modeling for fire spread and evacuation planning.
- Coordinate with fire scientists and CAL FIRE planners to identify high-risk zones and adjust zoning laws.
- Encourage compact urban forms to reduce wildland-urban interface (WUI) risks.

4. Community and Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure and community organizations should be central to recovery, fostering resilience and equitable resource distribution.

Key Points:

- Support social organizations and resilience hubs as integral to recovery and long-term resilience.
- Develop a strategic social infrastructure strategy, allocating space equitably for community hubs.
- Collaborate with schools and youth programs to foster climate action and urban resilience leadership.

5. Policy and Institutional Challenges

Policy reforms are needed to streamline recovery processes, enhance hazard disclosure, and address conflicts in zoning and insurance regulations.

Key Points:

- Streamline local, state, and federal policies to reduce institutional barriers in recovery.
- Address issues with fire insurance policies and funding mechanisms.
- Implement hazard disclosure processes and reassess zoning laws in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ).
- Advocate for exemptions from Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) in fire-prone cities.



6. Environmental Considerations

Fire resilience requires addressing environmental factors like vegetation management, water infrastructure, and sustainable energy use.

- **Key Points:**

- Study properties that survived fires to understand factors like terrain, wind, and materials used.
- Focus on vegetation management and collaboration with adjacent jurisdictions on fire prevention.
- Invest in renewable energy, water infrastructure, and rainwater capture systems.
- Remove toxins from burned areas before rebuilding.

7. Long-Term Resilience and Collaboration

Building long-term resilience demands interdisciplinary collaboration, expert input, and engagement with academic and professional networks.

- **Key Points:**

- Establish panels of experts to design fire-resilient communities and incorporate global best practices.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between urban planners, fire scientists, and disaster risk experts.
- Utilize existing frameworks like SCAG Greenprint for fire risk assessments.
- Stay connected with academic programs to inspire future leaders in resilience and sustainability.





TEN RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

1. Establish a Coordinated Recovery Network

- Facilitate collaboration, resource sharing, and progress updates among experts.
 - Create a shared platform or working group for regular communication (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams, or regular Zoom meetings).

2. Conduct Needs Assessments and Prioritize Assistance

- Ensure resources are directed toward the most vulnerable populations.
 - Work with local agencies, community organizations, and impacted residents to identify immediate and long-term needs.

3. Tap into Local and National Expertise

- Engage with wildfire researchers, planners, and disaster experts to adopt best practices. Leverage contacts with agencies like FEMA and APA for technical support.

4. Organize Recovery Investments

- Ensure funding prioritizes sustainable, equitable, and community-driven solutions.
 - Advocate for planners to guide recovery fund allocation.

5. Promote Policy and Systemic Changes

- Shift focus from immediate recovery to preventive measures to mitigate future disasters.
 - Draft and advocate for policies addressing long-term fire resilience, land-use planning, and infrastructure development.



6. Enhance Community and Behavioral Health Support

- Address the trauma of wildfire survivors and promote community resilience.
 - Partner with mental health organizations to offer counseling and stress management services for affected residents.

7. Strengthen Public Communication

- Combat misinformation and build trust.
 - Launch a public awareness campaign to educate communities about wildfire risks, preventive measures, and available resources.

8. Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- Ensure transparency, accountability, and adaptability in recovery strategies.
 - Action: Develop metrics to track recovery efforts and identify areas for improvement.

9. Share Lessons and Build a Knowledge Base

- Document best practices and lessons learned to share with other regions at risk of wildfires.
 - Publish case studies, host webinars, and present findings at conferences like APA or state planning events.

10. Foster Collaboration Across Agencies and Jurisdictions

- Goal: Streamline efforts and avoid duplication of resources.
 - Partner with city planners (e.g., LACo, Pasadena, Malibu) and relevant state agencies (e.g., OES, LCI).

RESOURCES

1. Financial Assistance:

- [Wildfire Task Force Grant Resources](#): Offers information on various grants available for wildfire recovery and mitigation efforts.
- [California Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Grants](#): Provides funding opportunities for projects that promote the preservation and restoration of rivers, mountains, and urban areas affected by wildfires.

2. Data and Metrics:

- [Wildfire Task Force Regional Resource Kits](#): Contains data and tools to assist in regional wildfire planning and response.

3. Expert Insights:

- [Article: "Inconvenient Truths About the Fires Burning in Los Angeles from Two Fire Experts"](#): Provides expert analysis on the causes and implications of wildfires in Los Angeles.

4. Planning and Best Practices:

- [OPR's Fire Hazard Planning Technical Advisory and WUI Planning Best Practices Guide](#): Guidelines developed to assist in fire hazard planning and implementing best practices in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).
- [Report: "Final Recommendations to Reduce Wildfire Risk to Existing and Future Development: Los Angeles County, California"](#): Prepared by Wildfire Planning International, LLC, Wildland Professional Solutions, Inc., and Clarion Associates, LLC, this report offers strategies to mitigate wildfire risks in Los Angeles County.

5. Community Initiatives:

- [Liberty Hill Foundation's Community Land Trust Campaign](#): Supports the creation and preservation of affordable housing through community land trusts, aiming to prevent displacement after disasters.

6. Recovery Planning:

- [SCAG Greenprint for Recovery Planning: A resource for sustainable and resilient recovery planning in Southern California](#).

7. Professional Guidance:

- [American Planning Association \(APA\)](#): Offers disaster relief experts and resources to help planners navigate FEMA's requirements.

8. Health and Wellbeing:

- [Integrative Health Framework for Wellbeing in the Built Environment: An academic article discussing how to design spaces that promote health and wellbeing, relevant for rebuilding efforts](#).

9. Official Resources:

- [California Government's Official Wildfire Resource Page](#): Provides comprehensive information and assistance for those affected by the 2025 Los Angeles fires.

10. Behavioral Health Services:

- [California Department of Public Health - Behavioral Health Services](#): Offers resources and support for mental health services, crucial for communities recovering from disasters.



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APPENDIX

[A Call to Action LinkedIn Post](#) by Miguel A. Vazquez, FACIP, January 11, 2025

[2025 LA County Fire Recovery Plan Ideas/Resources \(Responses\)](#)



This document was created by Miguel A. Vazquez, FAICP to assist planners responding to the impacts of the LA Fires and it's based on the responses received from A Call To Action via LinkedIn from January 11- January 18, 2025.

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