

Introduction

In recent years, wildfires have increased in frequency and magnitude. In January 2025, the Eaton and Palisades Fires burned through Los Angeles County, California for 24 days before being contained. Like elsewhere, wildfires prompted personal and economic hardship as well as environmental contamination. This project aimed to better understand the types of challenges community members face during and after a fire. A seven-month event timeline was also created.

Approach

A literature review was conducted pertaining to wildfires and their effect on people as well as individual and household level challenges. Government announcements, news articles, and the experiences of the authors were used to create the timeline for the Eaton and Palisades Fires in California. This information was then synthesized and compared to determine the consistency between the literature and the challenges that people impacted by the fires. This work is ongoing.

Results

The literature review revealed:

Individual challenges:

- Evacuation problems have plagued past California fire disasters. For example, “age, race, and income all have [had] a large and significant effect on when someone is first alerted to the wildfire...” [1].
- Households become displaced and experience financial hardships. “Some studies acknowledge that housing precarity is correlated with the inability of a household to access funding and increase its resilience to disasters.” [2]

Household challenges:

- Property insurance is one of the most significant wildfire challenges. For example, “The disillusionment phase also involves challenges associated with insurance. Many people who lose a home in a wildfire are under insured, and some are not insured at all.” [3]
- Reconstruction is a long and complicated process. Zoning, debris removal, investigation, adherence to building code, and home hardening all must be considered.
- Past wildfires have validated the six emotional phases of a disaster: (1) Pre-disaster, (2) Heroic, (3) Honeymoon, (4) Disillusionment, and (5) Reconstruction. [3]

Results

Challenges Reported in the Literature

Evacuation Problems
Displacement
Insurance
Reconstruction

Challenges during the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire

17 deaths occurred in Eaton in the same area that had delayed evacuation orders.

L.A. Group Dept. of Angels, June 2025 survey estimates 1 in 5 Altadena and 1 in 10 Pacific Palisades residents are living in their pre-fire homes [5].

State Farm Insurance cancelled 69% of the Pacific Palisades, California homeowner policies within zip code 90272 in March 2025 [4].

L.A. Group Dept of Angels: June 2025 survey estimates a 2 to 9 year range for personal rebuild time [5]. This range is within the range reported by Zavodny and Whelton (in review) from select wildfires over the past 7 years.

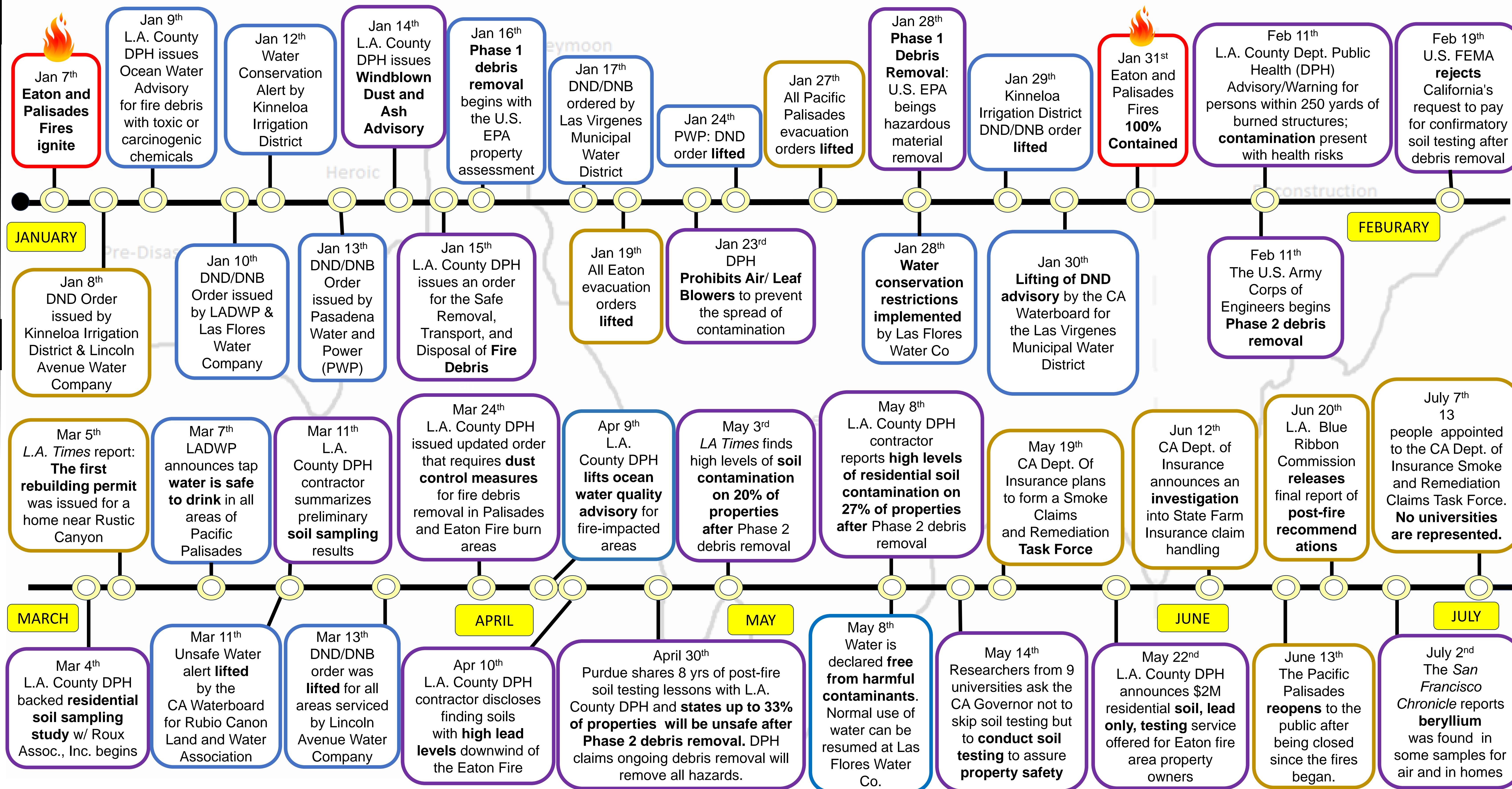


Figure. This six-month timeline consists of some reported events, warnings, and orders during and after the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire

Conclusion

Events that impacted individual and household experiences during and after the Eaton and Palisades Fires were consistent with the literature. Additional examination of the factors that influence each of the challenges is needed to better align policy and research to prevent or minimize their impacts. Given the growing threat that wildfires pose to U.S. populations each year, understanding the challenges to come will be essential to efficient and maximum recovery.

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