

January 26, 2026

RE: State of California Code as it pertains to Property Assessment and Restoration After Fire

To Whom It May Concern:

In the wake of the devastating 2025 wildfires in California—and in recognition of the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires statewide—there is a clear opportunity for California to strengthen and expedite wildfire and urban fire recovery through thoughtful legislation. This can be accomplished, in part, by establishing standardized, evidence-based requirements for post-fire property assessment and restoration.

I have witnessed firsthand the success of [standardized](#), science-based decision-making in post-fire recovery, particularly in the context of drinking water systems impacted by fire. The development and application of evidence-based [frameworks](#)—contributed to by the City of Santa Rosa, the Town of Paradise, and communities in Colorado, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Oregon —significantly improved recovery outcomes and public confidence.

By contrast, current post-fire property assessment and restoration practices—*both within California and nationwide*—remain inconsistent and [insufficiently](#) standardized. Based on my experience responding to multiple fires across diverse jurisdictions, I have observed that properties are not always safely restored in a timely or reliable manner.

Specifically, my teams have seen instances of incomplete or improper debris removal that leave hazardous materials behind; insufficient or absent soil testing needed to verify that contamination has been addressed; and inadequate remediation of standing structures. In some cases, these shortcomings have resulted in residents becoming ill after returning home. These outcomes are avoidable and represent serious public health risks, causes of [stress](#) and anxiety, as well as significant economic harm to families, businesses, and entire communities.

To address these challenges, I respectfully recommend that, should state legislation be proposed, that it consider the following actions following a wildfire or urban fire event:

1. Evidence-based soil testing to verify that hazardous debris and contaminants have been fully removed. When contamination is identified and remediation is required to restore pre-fire conditions, confirmatory soil testing should be required following cleanup.
2. Oversight by licensed professional engineers and licensed geologists with appropriate expertise to supervise debris removal, soil sampling, and remediation activities.
3. Indoor environmental testing to determine whether hazardous pollutants have infiltrated buildings. If contamination exceeds established cleanup goals and remediation is necessary to

achieve pre-fire conditions, such work should be overseen by licensed professional engineers with demonstrated experience in contaminated site assessment and post-disaster recovery.

4. To safeguard life, health, property, and public welfare, the professional engineers and geologists shall submit evidence that they are qualified to practice.
5. Clear cleanup goals for both outdoor and indoor environments that account for naturally occurring background contaminant levels and are grounded in health-risk-based criteria and the economic value of the property.

Each recommendation includes important technical and implementation details. Taken together, these measures would help ensure safer and faster recovery for Californians impacted by wildfires. Please do not hesitate to contact me at awhelton@purdue.edu.

Regards,

Andrew J. Whelton, Ph.D.

Since 2017 my multi-organizational team and I have been assisting communities respond to and recover from fires in and outside the United States. In response to the 2025 Los Angeles Fires, we have been working with and assisting California property owners, businesses, government officials, as well as academics on topics such as the safety of infrastructure, drinking water, soil, indoor environment, fruit and gardens, insurance, and mental health with several other partners. Results of some of our completed and ongoing work can be found [here](#). In addition to our government agency collaborators our college and university collaborators have included: University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Cal Poly Pomona, Chico State University, Butte College, University of California Berkeley, University of Southern California (USC), University of Kentucky, Tufts University, California State University, Northridge (CSUN), Colorado State University, Oregon State University, University of Colorado, Chapman University, California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech). Further, we have worked side by side with community groups, as well as individual households and business owners.