Date of Hearing: March 10, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS
Damon Connolly, Chair
AB 1642 (Harabedian) – As Amended March 2, 2026

SUBJECT: Wildfires: contamination standards

SUMMARY: Establishes the Wildfire Environmental Safety and Testing Act (Act), which, among other things, requires, by July 1, 2027, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to adopt emergency regulations specifying science-informed, health-based standards to guide the adequate removal of lead and asbestos inside and outside of standing homes, schools, workplaces, and other structures after a wildland urban interface (WUI) fire; requires, by July 1, 2028, DTSC to adopt non-emergency regulations specifying standards for additional contaminants; provides that the Act is an urgency statute. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Establishes the Wildfire Environmental Safety and Testing Act.

2) Makes several findings and declarations, including that existing law does not provide a uniform statewide framework to address post-wildfire habitability and reoccupancy based on public health exposure.

3) Establishes the following definitions:

   a) "WUI" means "wildland urban interface," the term used by the United States (U.S.) Fire Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to mean the zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development, including the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels;

   b) "WUI debris" includes, but is not limited to, ash, soot, and char; combustion byproducts; transmission electron microscopy (TEM)-identified asbestos; California Administrative Manual 17 (CAM 17) heavy metals; cyanide; lithium; manganese; dioxins; furans; polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs); and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in indoor air, resulting from a wildfire event;

   c) "WUI impact zone" means the WUI area plus the maximum perimeter of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CalFire) Damage Inspection Data map area and the adjacent downwind ash zone;

   d) "Contamination" means property polluted by WUI debris;

   e) "Hazardous chemical" means a chemical that is determined by a local health officer or DTSC to be toxic, carcinogenic, explosive, corrosive, or flammable;

   f) "TEM-identified asbestos" means transmission electron microscopy-identified asbestos;

   g) "Clearance" means a formal determination that a home, school, workplace, or other structure has been cleared of WUI debris and that any remaining hazardous chemicals meet the standards established pursuant to AB 1642.

h) "Department" means DTSC; and,

i) "Office" means the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA).

4) Requires DTSC, by July 1, 2027 and in consultation with relevant coordinating agencies, to adopt emergency regulations specifying science-informed, health-based standards for investigation, environmental testing, and clearance, to guide the adequate removal of lead and TEM-identified asbestos inside and outside of homes, schools, workplaces, and other structures in residential areas after a wildfire; provides that the adoption and readoption of the emergency regulations shall be deemed to be an emergency and necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health and safety, or general welfare, as specified, and DTSC shall be exempted from the requirement that it describe facts showing the need for immediate action.

5) Requires, in order to protect the public health of residents of standing homes, schools, workplaces, or other structures after a WUI fire and to prevent the onset of new cancer cases attributable to a WUI fire, that the emergency regulations adopted by DTSC include all of the following:

a) A presumption that a home, school, workplace, or other structure is safe for human occupancy only if the levels of lead and TEM-identified asbestos on an indoor surface meet both of the following conditions:

i) For lead, less than or equal to 5 micrograms per square foot ($\mu g/ft^2$) on floors, and less than or equal to 40 $\mu g/ft^2$ on windowsills; and,

ii) For TEM-identified asbestos, less than or equal to 1 structure per square centimeter;

b) A presumption that, if WUI debris is present in a surviving home, school, workplace, or other structure after a WUI fire, any identified hazardous contamination in the WUI impact zone is the result of that WUI fire;

c) Requirements for testing for lead and TEM-identified asbestos in a surviving home, school, workplace, or other structure that include, at a minimum, testing of all of the following locations: indoor floors, window sills, and interior horizontal hard surfaces; garage floors and garage horizontal hard surfaces; attics; and heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems;

d) Requirements for pre-remediation testing to understand where contaminants are present, to guide appropriately licensed cleanup efforts and ensure worker safety;

e) Requirements for post-remediation testing after debris cleanup, to confirm whether:

i) Lead and TEM-identified asbestos have been removed from the home, school, workplace, or other structure and clearance has been achieved, or to determine that further remediation efforts are required; and,

ii) Remediation reduced the levels of combustion byproducts, CAM 17 heavy metals, cyanide, lithium, manganese, dioxins, furans, PAHs, and VOCs in indoor air;

f) Standards set forth in DTSC's "Residential soil evaluation guidance for the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires," including the standards for soil sampling based on property damage levels; and,

g) Guidance on the use of other restoration strategies, including, but not limited to, the repair or replacement of damaged structures if remediation cannot achieve clearance.

6) Requires that testing standards adopted under DTSC's emergency regulations include conditions in which testing behind drywall is required, and that pre-remediation and post-remediation testing standards include testing for known WUI fire hazards, including lead, TEM-identified asbestos, combustion byproducts, CAM 17 heavy metals, cyanide, lithium, manganese, dioxins, furans, PAHs, and VOCs in indoor air.

7) Requires DTSC to adopt nonemergency regulations, as specified, through the regular rulemaking process for science-informed, health-based standards for lead and TEM-identified asbestos; authorizes these standards to be stricter than those stated above under (5)(a).

8) Requires, by July 1, 2028, DTSC to adopt nonemergency regulations specifying science-informed, health-based standards for hazardous chemicals, including levels for these chemicals that are required to achieve clearance for a home, school, workplace, or other structure, as well as standards for investigation, environmental testing, and to guide the removal of hazardous chemicals inside and outside of a home, school, workplace, or other structure in a residential area after a wildfire; requires the adopted standards to be established at levels intended to ensure that residents can safely reoccupy their homes, schools, workplaces, and other structures and to prevent the onset of new cancer cases attributable to a WUI fire; requires DTSC to adopt these standards in consultation with OEHHA.

9) Requires, in order to protect the public health of residents of standing homes, schools, workplaces, or other structures after a WUI fire, that the nonemergency regulations adopted by DTSC include all of the following:

a) Adoption of the emergency regulations described above, including standards for the levels of lead and TEM-identified asbestos on an indoor surface;

b) A presumption that if WUI debris is present in a surviving home, school, workplace, or other structure after a WUI fire, any identified hazardous contamination in the WUI impact zone is a result of that WUI fire;

c) Requirements for testing in a surviving home, school, workplace, or other structure that include, at a minimum, testing of all of the following locations: indoor floors, window sills, and interior horizontal hard surfaces; garage floors and garage horizontal hard surfaces; attics; and HVAC systems;

d) Requirements for pre-remediation testing to understand what hazardous chemicals are present, to guide appropriately licensed cleanup efforts and ensure worker safety;

e) Requirements for post-remediation testing after debris cleanup, to confirm that WUI debris and contamination have been removed from the home, school, workplace, or other structure, or to determine that further remediation efforts are required; and,

f) Standards to ensure that a home, school, workplace, or other structure is safe to inhabit; requires the standards to include steps to ensure that a home, school, workplace, or other structure is habitable to pre-fire conditions and that the home, school, workplace, or other structure has reached clearance before a resident is required to move back into the resident's home or return to a structure.

10) Requires that testing standards adopted under DTSC's non-emergency regulations include conditions in which testing behind drywall is required, and that pre-remediation and post-remediation testing standards include testing for known WUI fire hazards, including TEM-identified asbestos, combustion byproducts, CAM 17 heavy metals, cyanide, lithium, manganese, dioxins, furans, PAHs, and VOCs in indoor air.

11) Provides that the Wildfire Environmental Safety and Testing Act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, as specified, due to the immediate need to remediate contamination and rebuild housing in the communities of Los Angeles and Ventura counties that were impacted by the wildfires that began on January 7, 2025.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Establishes the Hazardous Waste Control Law (HWCL) to authorize DTSC to regulate the management of hazardous wastes in California. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 25100, *et seq.*)

2) Defines "hazardous waste" as waste, that, because of its quantity, concentration, or physical, chemical, or infectious characteristics:

   a) Causes, or significantly contributes to, an increase in mortality or an increase in serious irreversible, or incapacitating reversible, illness; or,

   b) Poses a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment, due to factors including, but not limited to, carcinogenicity, acute toxicity, chronic toxicity, bio accumulative properties, or persistence in the environment, when improperly treated, stored, transported, disposed of, or otherwise managed. (HSC § 25141(b))

3) Requires DTSC, under the HWCL, to adopt, and revise when appropriate, standards and regulations for the management of hazardous wastes to protect against hazards to public health, domestic livestock, wildlife, or the environment. (HSC § 25150)

4) Establishes DTSC's Toxicity Criteria for Human Health Risk Assessments, Screening Levels, and Remediation Goals (Toxicity Criteria Rule) for hazardous waste and hazardous substance cleanup sites; requires, among other things, that human health risk assessment calculations—including, but not limited to, all cancer risk and non-cancer hazard screening levels and corrective action objectives—use the toxicity criteria specified under the Toxicity Criteria Rule and attain human health protection, as specified. (22 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 68400.5).

5) Specifies, under the Toxicity Criteria Rule, criteria for all human health risk assessments, human health risk-based screening levels, and human health risk-based remediation goals

statewide, for the cleanup of releases of hazardous waste or hazardous substances to the environment. (22 CCR § 69020-69022)

6) Defines, under DTSC's health standards for the management of hazardous waste, "remediation goal" to mean a contaminant concentration that is media-specific (e.g., for air, groundwater, surface water, or soil affected by a release), site-specific, protective of human health and the environment, and used as a final cleanup goal for a response or corrective action. (22 CCR § 69020(c)(5))

7) Defines, under DTSC's health standards for the management of hazardous waste, "screening level" to mean a risk-based, contaminant concentration, calculated as specified and considered to be protective for humans (including sensitive groups) over a lifetime. (22 CCR § 69020(c)(6))

8) Requires DTSC to develop sampling and analytical methods for the collection of methamphetamine residue; requires DTSC, to the extent funding is available, to develop health-based target remediation standards for iodine, methyl iodide, and phosphine; authorizes DTSC, to the extent funding is available and using guidance developed by OEHHA, to develop additional health-based target remediation standards for additional precursors and byproducts of methamphetamine; requires DTSC to adopt investigation and cleanup procedures for use in the remediation of sites contaminated by the illegal manufacturing of methamphetamine; requires the procedures to ensure that contamination can be remediated to meet DTSC's remediation standards, to protect the health and safety of all future occupants of the site. (HSC § 79380)

9) Establishes the federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which, among other things, empowers the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) with the authority to require reporting, record-keeping, and testing requirements, and restrictions relating to chemical substances and mixtures. (15 U.S.C. § 2601, *et seq.*)

10) Establishes, under TSCA, dust-lead hazard standards, post-abatement clearance levels, and abatement requirements for lead-based paint in certain residential structures. (40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 745.61, *et seq.*)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill: According to the author:

> "The 2025 Los Angeles Wildfires exposed the enormous gaps in our wildfire recovery protocol, specifically around testing and remediation for smoke damaged properties. There are currently no statewide standards for how to handle smoke damaged homes, what contaminants to test for, and what levels are unsafe for re-occupancy. This bill makes one thing clear: when it comes to our families' health we trust science. AB 1642 will create a statewide scientific standard for when it's safe to return to a home after an urban wildfire. Public health will be the standard, not the exception."

Wildfires are increasing in frequency and severity: According to the California Air Resources Board, the frequency and severity of wildfires have been increasing, both in the state and all over

the world. Since 1950, the area burned annually by California wildfires has grown, as spring and summer temperatures increase and spring snowmelt occurs earlier. CalFire data show that four out of the five most destructive wildfires in California history happened in just the last 10 years. In 2025, the Eaton and Palisades fires in Los Angeles County destroyed over 16,000 structures and burned 38,000 acres combined; in 2018, the Camp Fire in Butte County destroyed nearly 19,000 structures and burned 153,000 acres; and in 2017, the Tubbs Fire in Napa and Sonoma counties destroyed more than 5,500 structures and burned nearly 37,000 acres.

WUI fire implications for communities: The Eaton, Palisades, Camp, and Tubbs fires, as well as major wildfires in other states, including the 2023 Lahaina fire in Hawaii and 2021 Marshall Fire in Colorado, are all examples of WUI fires. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, the WUI is the "zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development…the line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels."

Although the area burned in the WUI comprises a relatively small percentage of the overall burn area caused by wildfires, the majority of damage to human structures, including homes, businesses, and schools, occurs in the WUI, as summarized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Forest Service on its webpage "Interface areas are critical to wildfire losses: Half of all buildings lost in these WUI areas with relatively low fuels":

> "In California and the entire United States, wildfire management has become more complex, costly and dangerous. Research by a Northern Research Station scientist and her partners found that wildfire losses in California are most common in interface areas, which lack dense wildland fuels. Interface WUI, i.e. settled areas with little wildland vegetation that are near large blocks of wildland vegetation, contained over 50% of all buildings lost to wildfire while making up only 2% of all wildfire perimeters by area (fires from 1985-2013)."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, more than 60,000 communities across the U.S. are at risk for WUI fires; between 2002 and 2016, an average of over 3,000 structures per year were lost to WUI fires; and the WUI area continues to grow by about 2 million acres per year. California—where between 30% and 45% of houses are in the WUI—is among the top five states with the most homes in WUI areas.

Urban conflagrations pose unique human health risks: When fires in the WUI burn into densely populated areas, wildfires can transition into urban conflagrations, in which fires spread rapidly from structure-to-structure. In the wake of these fires, both the interiors and exteriors of structures can become polluted by smoke residue, ash, and debris, which in turn can contain toxic chemicals. The 2025 article, "In the ashes," published in the journal *Science,* describes the unique health concerns posed by these types of fires, using the Eaton fire as an example:

> "The blaze that consumed parts of Altadena started as a brush fire on a hillside near Eaton Canyon. At first, the smoke would have been a predictable mixture of hundreds of chemicals that are known to emanate from plant-fueled fires, including microscopic particles, toxic gases, and nitrogen-based molecules such as ammonia.
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> But within hours, the nature of the fire—and the smoke—changed dramatically. Winds gusting at more than 100 kilometers per hour showered nearby homes with embers, igniting blazes that overwhelmed firefighters. As entire blocks burned through the night, the

> billowing smoke became more complex and mysterious—filled with a range of toxic compounds from the burning of lead-based paint, lithium batteries, vinyl siding, fiberglass insulation, electrical wiring, nylon clothes, rubber tires, and more…
>
> Fires have been blamed for a long list of health ills. Wildland fire smoke has been linked to increased hospital admissions for asthma, strokes, and heart attacks. House fires have been associated with higher levels of cancer in firefighters.
>
> But new hazards arise when those two things meet and a wildfire consumes an entire neighborhood. The high intensity of wildfire can alter the chemicals swirling in the air after they are emitted from burning houses. The number of people affected when wildfire sweeps into urban areas also dwarfs the number exposed during a typical house fire. More than 18 million people live in the greater LA metropolitan area, and a huge swath of them were bathed in hazardous levels of air pollution in January. Tests at the California Institute of Technology, for instance, 4 kilometers from Altadena, found elevated levels of lead in ash that seeped into campus buildings."

Emerging science reveals indoor and outdoor chemical hazards after WUI fires: In its 2022 report, "The chemistry of fires at the wildland-urban interface," the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine note the significant human health threats posed by WUI fire chemical hazards, as well as some of the challenges associated with investigating these hazards after fire events:

> "Health risks associated with toxicants from WUI fires can persist well beyond the active burning of the fire, due to contamination of the ecosystem (water and soil) and built environments. Health impacts can also extend well beyond the WUI communities, as smoke can be transported for hundreds to thousands of kilometers. While toxicants from WUI fires are a recognized problem, their variability and complexity present significant challenges. For example, the emissions from a WUI fire can vary depending on whether the fire burns homes, cars, or commercial areas; even a subset of these fuel types can vary, such as homes of different ages made of different materials. Emissions vary depending on fuel composition, fire characteristics, and the heating dynamics that the fuels experience. Human exposure can vary greatly, depending on weather patterns during and after the fire, personal activities, and the living and working circumstances of the people exposed."

Despite the challenges, emerging science points to the presence of toxic chemicals after WUI fire events. In the wake of the Eaton and Palisades fires, researchers from multiple research institutions—including Harvard University; the University of Southern California; Stanford University; the University of California (UC), Davis; UC, Irvine; UC, Los Angeles; the University of Texas at Austin; and Yale University—launched a collective scientific effort to investigate the short- and long-term health impacts of the fires. The 10-year study, called the LA Fire Health Study, aims to evaluate the types, levels, locations, and human health impacts of pollutants associated with the fires. So far, the collaborative has reported, through a series of briefs, the discovery of several types of concerning chemicals inside and outside of structures, including VOCs in indoor and outdoor air; chromium-6 in outdoor air; and benzene and other VOCs in tap water.

A 2024 study by Jech, et al., published in *Environmental Science and Technology,* reports that residential properties affected by the Marshall Fire had elevated concentrations of heavy metals

in soil, including zinc, copper, chromium, and lead, though the levels were below soil standards established by the US EPA for sites contaminated by hazardous waste. Another study by Allen et al., published in 2025 in *The Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology,* summarizes research showing that there was a 110-fold increase in atmospheric lead levels (documented through initial air monitoring after the fires), and elevated lead levels in soil in areas downwind of the Eaton Fire. Allen et al. conclude that this lead "poses a long-term risk of exposure, particularly for biologically sensitive populations like children, through contact with contaminated soil or inhalation of lead dust."

In December 2025, the *New York Times* (NYT) article "How did this family end up back in a toxic house?" reported findings from an investigation, in which the NYT asked a family impacted by the Eaton Fire for permission to have a certified professional test for lead and other heavy metals in each room of their house, and to submit strands of hair so scientists could measure the family's exposure to metals over time. The family's home had already undergone cleaning recommended by their insurance company, which included ripping out their attic insulation; vacuuming and mopping their floors; wiping countertops and other surfaces; laundering carpets and drapes; and using air scrubbers in every room. The readings, taken a month after the family had moved back into their home, showed that six out of 11 samples collected in the house had "unsafe levels of contaminants, including extremely high levels of lead." The NYT also found that readings for lead on the floor next to the refrigerator and where the kitchen tile met the dining room floor were 27 times and seven times, respectively, the federal hazard limit for lead established under the US EPA's lead-based paint program. In addition, the investigation found a lead level near 8,000 $\mu g/ft^2$ in a sample taken from the HVAC in the attic. For context, the US EPA's action levels—the level at which the US EPA recommends abatement under its lead-based paint program—for lead in dust on floors, window sills, and window troughs are 5 $\mu g/ft^2$, 40 $\mu g/ft^2$, and 100 $\mu g/ft^2$, respectively. Hair samples from the family showed "measurable spikes in heavy metals after [the family] returned to the home in August, indicating a period of elevated exposure."

The need for uniform, health-protective standards: For homes that have burned, the Department of Resources, Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and DTSC, along with federal partners, implement a phased approach to clearing properties. Typically, Phase 2 of this approach includes soil testing and the removal of contaminated debris, ash, and soil. However, in the case of the Los Angeles fires, FEMA assigned Phase 2 to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and California formally requested, but the federal government denied, confirmation soil sampling as part of the debris removal process.

For homes, schools, and workplaces that remain standing, but have been impacted by WUI fire smoke and debris, there are no uniform state or federal standards pertaining to investigation, testing, and remediation for indoor chemical hazards. While there are screening and remediation goals for soil contaminants, testing protocols have been inconsistently applied; as noted above, FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers did not perform post-remediation testing to confirm that soil removal was successful at addressing soil contaminants. Residents returning to their homes have reported feeling concerned about whether it is safe to do so, as illustrated in the NYT article described above:

> "Every day, he vacuums, mops and wipes every surface in his house, which stands on one of the blocks in Altadena, Calif., that survived the flames of the Los Angeles wildfires, but not the smoke.

> He works in deliberate lines across the kitchen tile, then along the baseboards, then into the corners where the smoke pooled nearly a year ago—following a map only he can see.
>
> It's the only way to quiet his thoughts: Is it safe for his children, 6-year-old Sylvia and 9-year-old Milo, to walk barefoot on the kitchen tiles? Should he wash the toys they drop on the floor with bleach, or with soap and water? The darkest thoughts are about his wife, Cathlene Pineda, 41, a jazz pianist who is on medication for cancer. If the toxins were in the house, he wonders, could they bring the cancer back?"

In the absence of state and federal health-based standards, various entities have developed professional standards and certifications to guide the work of remediation and testing by contractors and hygienists, as well as recommendations for residents. In August 2025, DTSC and CalRecycle released their "Residential soil guidance for the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires," which contains screening levels for various soil contaminants (screening levels are used to help determine if the amount of chemicals in a sample indicates a health risk), step-by-step instructions for survivors and local authorities for soil sampling based on property damage levels, information on how to interpret results, and an overview of professional remediation methods. After the Los Angeles wildfires, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health also developed tips to guide contamination assessments and cleanup efforts by residents.

State expertise on toxic chemicals and human health: Many of California's laws and regulations pertaining to toxic chemicals and human health are enforced or implemented by DTSC and OEHHA. Among other things, DTSC is responsible for enforcing laws and regulations aimed at preventing the release of hazardous waste into the environment, cleaning up contamination at hazardous waste sites, and ensuring hazardous waste is handled safely. To further the aim of protecting human health, DTSC implements its Toxicity Criteria Rule, which specifies the toxicity criteria that must be used to prepare human health risk assessments and calculate screening levels and remediation goals (also referred to as cleanup levels), based on human health risks at hazardous waste and hazardous substance release sites. DTSC is also responsible for implementing the state's Illegal Drug Lab Removal Program, which involves the cleanup of a range of toxic chemicals, including VOCs, corrosive chemicals, illicit drugs, and other chemical by-products. Under this program, DTSC worked with OEHHA to develop a clean-up level for homes identified as former methamphetamine labs.

OEHHA is California's lead state agency for the scientific evaluation of health risks posed by environmental contaminants and hazardous substances. Among other things, OEHHA compiles the state's list of substances that cause cancer or reproductive harm under the state's Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, commonly known as Proposition 65. OEHHA also develops health-protective exposure levels for contaminants in air, water, and soil as guidance for regulatory agencies and the public. To accomplish their work, DTSC employs industrial hygienists, and both DTSC and OEHHA employ scientists and toxicologists.

The Smoke Claims and Remediation Task Force: In May 2025, out of recognition that California needs consistent statewide standards for investigating and paying smoke damage claims, the California Department of Insurance (CDI) established the Smoke Claims and Remediation Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force was charged with:

- Evaluating existing methods of best practices and recommending uniform standards for inspecting, testing, and remediating properties with smoke damage;

- Recommending standards for determining whether structures damaged are below, at, or above, established levels for health and safety of occupants; and,

- Determining which state and local government agencies must be involved in creating and enforcing these standards, including to mitigate the submission of fraudulent or exaggerated smoke claims.

In July 2025, CDI announced appointments to the Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of representatives from CDI, the California Department of Public Health, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, CalFIRE, United Policyholders, the Consumer Federation of California Education Foundation; Safeguard EnviroGroup, Inc.; Anderson Group International; HRA Environmental Consultants, Inc.; Forensic Analytical Consulting Services; Personal Insurance Federation of California; and the American Property Casualty Insurance Association. According to CDI, the Task Force will finalize its recommendations in March 2026.

This bill: The science on toxic chemicals after WUI fires and urban conflagrations is complex and emerging, and yet residents impacted by these events urgently need science-based standards to ensure that they can safely return to their homes and their communities. This is a cutting-edge issue with major human health implications, underscoring the importance of having chemical hazard and scientific experts play a role in developing these standards. AB 1642 aims to fill this gap by requiring DTSC to adopt regulations specifying science-informed, health-based standards, to guide investigation, testing, and remediation efforts after WUI fire events.

Arguments in support: Writing in support, Eaton Fire Residents United (a coalition of more than 4,000 residents impacted by the Eaton Fire) states:

> "Multiple carcinogenic substances have been found in the indoor 'dust' particles and ash soil deposits, including asbestos, arsenic, beryllium, chromium-6, dioxins, PAHs, and VOCs. These environmental hazards can lead to skin and lung irritation, lesions in the lungs, chest pain, immune suppression, gastrointestinal conditions, reproductive issues, headaches and dizziness, cardiovascular damage to the heart and blood vessels, organ damage, mesothelioma, and skin, lung, stomach, bladder, and intestinal cancer…For certain toxic substances, such as asbestos, there is NO safe level, and once inside your body, it can never be removed from your lung tissue (American Lung Association, 2023).
>
> Other toxic substances, such as antimony, barium, cadmium, cobalt, copper, cyanide, furans, lead, lithium, mercury, molybdenum, nickel, selenium, silver, thallium, vanadium, and zinc, are found in homes post-fire, as confirmed in over 300 independent industrial hygienist reports of indoor contamination in Eaton Fire-affected communities of Altadena, Pasadena, and Sierra Madre (Maccalla et al., 2026)…Across studies, lead is showing up above EPA dust lead action levels 75-100% of the time, often at levels thousands of times higher than what is deemed safe for human exposure (Goftari et al., 2026; Maccalla et al., 2025; Tissot et al., 2025). Lead is particularly concerning because of the risk for multigenerational harm, as it is stored in a mother's bones and can be released into the bloodstream and passed to the fetus during pregnancy (Gooma et al., 2002; Gulsson et al., 1997; Hu et al., 1998; Sen et al., 2015; Silbergeld, 1991). EFRU's data (Maccalla et al., 2026) shows that 6 out of 10 homes that have been remediated are still not habitable due to lead and/or asbestos levels,

demonstrating the severity of the matter and the urgent need for actionable health-based standards and clear investigative guidance…

The toxicity of wildfire smoke and urban conflagrations is well documented (Aguilera et al., 2021; Benmarhnia et al., 2025; Boaggio et al., 2022; Gould et al., 2024; Lopez et al., 2023; Reid et al., 2016; Johnston et al., 2012). Without testing and investigation standards for the recovery of a standing building that survived the fire, or the soil around it, WUI fire-related contamination poses a serious public health threat to our communities. Recent studies, associated with the 2025 LA megafires, have already documented the adverse effects of exposure to wildfire smoke and returning home, including increased heart rate, reduced rates of cellular repair, metabolic changes, protein changes (oxidative stress, energy metabolism, nucleotide synthesis and repair), immune and inflammatory responses, sleep disturbances, physiological stress, compromised physical and mental health, increased health care utilization, and excess mortality (Desai et al., 2026; Jung et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026; Liao et al., 2026; Toepperwien et al., 2026; Toprani et al., 2026; Xiang et al., 2026).

With the growing frequency and severity of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) fires, residents, public health departments, and insurance companies need standards to navigate disaster recovery. Currently, there are few statewide standards governing the recovery of standing structures and soil after a wildland–urban interface (WUI) fire. AB 1642 prioritizes science and human health in setting testing protocols and determining when it is safe to return home. Our community needs a safe return, a safe rebuild, and a safe recovery. The goal should be the complete restoration of our communities, and a key path to getting there is to understand the damage and then to remove the disaster-related debris and hazardous chemicals to health-based federal and/or state regulatory levels, offering the greatest protection for community members. Surviving a WUI fire should not be a death sentence. EFRU supports a clearance-before-occupancy approach to WUI fire recovery."

Arguments in opposition: Writing in opposition, a coalition of groups comprised of the American Property Casualty Insurance Association, the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, Pacific Association of Domestic Insurers, and the Personal Insurance Federation of California states:

"Smoke claims have become a difficult issue over the past few years as the impacts of climate change cause larger and more urban adjacent fires, particularly the LA Fires in 2025. Given the complexity of smoke within insurance claims, CDI convened a Smoke Claims Task Force in the Summer of 2025. The question posed to this group was how to establish what is covered by an insurance policy for smoke damage following a wildfire, what should be tested for, who should do testing, and what 'safe' levels should be. This Task Force is nearing the completion of that work.

The new language usurps the ongoing work of the CDI and subsequent policy negotiations by inappropriately granting overlapping and conflicting authority over claims handling to DTSC. Specifically, AB 1642 would do the following:

- Establishes an automatic presumption of toxic conditions for virtually all structures affected by WUI fires based solely on the presence of debris, without requiring any showing of actual exposure or chemical intrusion.

- Mandates pre-remediation and post-remediation testing, including invasive sampling of drywall, HVAC systems, attics, and other building components—despite no scientific consensus that these methods are appropriate or necessary for wildfire impacts.

- Defines 'clearance' in a way that lacks thresholds for most contaminants, effectively requiring cleanup to background-free conditions or 'zero,' which is scientifically unrealistic and inconsistent with normal built-environment chemical baselines.

- Ignores established background levels of chemicals that exist even in unaffected homes, schools, and workplaces.

- Uses vague terms such as 'science-informed' without requiring peer review, consensus standards, or validation through recognized scientific bodies.

- Risks bypassing consensus-based standards organizations such as the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) and Institute for Inspection, Cleaning, and Remediation Certification (IICRC) in favor of ad hoc or advocacy-driven criteria.

- Assigns DTSC a central role in developing standards for indoor contamination—despite DTSC's limited expertise in indoor air quality, building science, and habitability assessments.

- Fails to distinguish between homes, schools, and workplaces, which differ substantially in exposure pathways, occupancy patterns, and applicable regulatory frameworks.

- Will significantly increase costs both to insurers and policyholders, exacerbate expert shortages, slow reoccupancy, and ultimately impede recovery for affected communities.

With the Task Force's work anticipated to be completed this month, we feel that this policy, which has not been able to consider the recommendations of that group, is premature."

Related legislation:

1) AB 1795 (Gipson). States the intent of the Legislature to set forth standards and protocols to ensure the health and safety of residents, and for the proper handling of smoke damaged residential property insurance claims caused by wildfires, after consideration of recommendations in the Task Force Report, as well as other relevant scientific and health-based sources. This bill is pending referral by the Assembly Rules Committee.

2) AB 1 (Connolly, Chapter 472, Statutes of 2025). Requires, by January 1, 2030 and every five years thereafter, CDI to consider whether to update the Safer from Wildfires regulations to include certain building hardening measures.

3) SB 1176 (Niello, 2024). Would have required CalFire, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, and DTSC, in consultation with academic and research institutions with demonstrated relevant expertise, and any other governmental agency or educational institution that may have experience in public health and wildfires, to form a workgroup related to toxic heavy metal exposure after a wildfire. This bill was held on the suspense file in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

4) AB 541 (Wood, Chapter 530, Statutes of 2023). Requires the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) to require a public water system that has experienced a major wildfire event of 300 acres or more and under specified conditions to perform sample collection and analysis of its source waters for the presence of benzene as soon as it is safe to do so. Authorizes the State Water Board to require the public water system to take specified response actions if benzene is detected.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

301 Organics
350 Southland Legislative Alliance
AAM Eaton Fire Recovery Advocates
After The Fire
Altadena ACT
Altadena Community Land Trust
Altadena Earthseed Community Land Trust
Altadena NAACP
Altadena Recovery Team
Altadena Rising
Altadena Tenants Union
Altagether
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization
Asian Pacific Environmental Network Action
BW Builder
California Black Power Network
California Community Foundation
California Interfaith Power & Light
Camp Fire Collaborative
Catalyst California
CCC
Center for Biological Diversity
Centre for Applied Ecological Remediation
Champion Cleaners Inc
Christopherson Builders
Clergy Community Coalition
Climate and Wildfire Institute
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights
Coalition for a Safe Fire Recovery
Collaborate PASadena
Community 3.0x
Consumer Watchdog
Conservation Strategies
Courage California
Day One
Eaton Fire Collaborative
Eaton Fire Renters Collation
Eaton Fire Residents United

Eaton Fire Survivors Network
End Child Poverty California powered by GRACE
ETS Lambda Omega Chapter/Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.
Fire Safe Palisades
First Unitarian Church of SanJose, Environmental Justice
GreenFaith
HPP CARES
Idle Dot
Indivisible Alta-Pasadena
JOAN Collaborative
L.Z. Design Group
L.A. Region Community Recovery Organization
LA Voice
Lao Vargas
Leap of Faith Family to Family Support
LIFT LA
Little Tokyo Service Center
Marshall Roc
McCain Consulting Services, Inc
Meteorite Rea Estate
My Tribe Rise
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nefresh
P.E.A.R.L.S. of Compassion
Pacific Film Foundation
PAILPOWER
Palisades Recovery Coalition
Pasadena Community Job Center/NDLON
Pasadena Job Center
Pasadena/Altadena Ivy Foundation
Pasadenans Organizing for Progress
Physicians Organizing Progress
Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles
Plant Community LA
Public Counsel
Reclaim Our Power: Utility Justice Campaign
Resilient Palisades
Rise Economy
Rogue Food Unites
Sander Architects
Sonoma County Climate Activist Network
Sunita Jain Anti-trafficking Initiative
The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights
The Neighborhood/Dena Holidays
The Change Reaction
Town of Superior
United Policyholders
Utility Wildfire Survivor Coalition

Vida Mobil Clinic
Xtreme Athletics Org
640 Individuals

Opposition

American Property Casualty Insurance Association
National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies
Pacific Association of Domestic Insurance Companies
Personal Insurance Federation of California

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