

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 3, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

Since January 7, 2025, at least ten wildfires have devastated the greater Los Angeles region — tragically claiming the lives of at least 28 people¹ and destroying over 12,000 structures, leaving thousands homeless.² As the fires continue to burn and as the recovery process begins, residents also are rightly fearful of potential impacts on regional air and water quality, as well as soil contamination.

Urban wildfires, unlike brush or forest fires, burn through homes, commercial buildings, cars, and other structures, which can release dangerous toxins that are not captured by standard Air Quality Index (AQI) measures.³ As you know, AQI is calculated using common air pollutants including particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), ozone (smog), carbon monoxide, and nitrogen dioxide; however, AQI does not measure other pollutants like larger ash particles, asbestos, chlorine, lead, and other heavy metals.⁴

Despite the fires, recent AQI levels in greater Los Angeles have ranged from “Good” to “Moderate”⁵ even with the threat of things like asbestos or lead in the air, because AQI does not measure all potential airborne wildfire-related pollutants. Residents are, therefore, unsure of the actual risks they face, and confused by conflicting reports about how safe it is to breathe the air outside, which may lead to families not taking adequate protective measures. This lack of full information could increase the risk of long-term negative health effects, especially among vulnerable populations like children, pregnant women, and the elderly, regardless of whether or not people are in areas that have been directly impacted by wildfires.⁶

In order to protect the residents of greater Los Angeles throughout the ongoing crisis and recovery, we urgently request that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) convene an interagency task force to monitor all possible hazardous air, water and soil pollutants and disseminate guidance to residents detailing necessary protective measures. Specifically, we request that the EPA:

1. Convene a task force comprised of all relevant federal agencies and local partners including, but not limited to, the EPA, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S Army Corps of

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/victims-killed-los-angeles-wildfires/>

² <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF12871?source=search>

³ <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/18/nx-s1-5266139/los-angeles-fires-smoke-air-quality-health-tips>

⁴ <https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/article/ash-below-blue-sky-above-is-the-air-safe/>

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<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/6a6a058a177440fdac6be881d41d4c2c/?id=3d51b5d2fc8d42d9af8c04f3c00f88d3>

⁶ <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IN12194?source=search>

Engineers (USACE), South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), LA County Department of Public Health and other relevant organizations.

2. Use all tools at their disposal, including federally-funded monitoring networks, to continually monitor all air, water and soil hazards, including ash, lead, asbestos, chlorine and other toxins.
3. Disseminate information to the public on a regular basis regarding any ongoing hazards in the region throughout the cleanup and recovery period, and provide clear and frequent guidance to greater Los Angeles residents on appropriate measures necessary to protect their health.

These wildfires have caused heartbreaking loss for thousands of people, and we urgently request that the EPA convene this task force and begin monitoring hazards and disseminating information to prevent further negative health impacts as quickly as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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