

FACT SHEET: LEAD IN SOIL



DATE RELEASED: August 8, 2025

RECOMMENDATION FOR ADDITIONAL SOIL TESTING IN LA FIRES AND LOWER CLEARANCE THRESHOLD FOR LEAD

WHAT WE KNOW:

- Air quality monitoring during the active fires showed elevated levels of lead in the air.
- Testing of firefighters who fought the LA fires found higher blood levels of lead than their counterparts who fought in wilderness fires.
- Recent soil testing at homes in the Palisades and Altadena areas revealed a significant number of homes, including homes located outside of the burn areas, with lead that exceeds existing screening levels.

WHAT DID WE DO?

In response to community concerns and questions to our team and others regarding determining 'safe' levels in soil after the LA fires, we undertook an evaluation of existing lead soil testing strategies and thresholds for cleanup.

WHAT ARE WE RECOMMENDING?

We recommend two critical reforms:

- Post-clearance confirmatory soil testing should be required after wildfire cleanup, as has been done for every major wildfire in California since 2007¹
- California's residential Preliminary Remediation Goal (PRG) for lead in soil should be lowered from 80 mg/kg to 55 mg/kg to reflect updated science and health-protective standards.

WHY IS THIS CHANGE NEEDED?

Repeated testing after purported soil remediation is showing that greater than 20% of properties tested still have lead levels that exceed existing thresholds, and the 80 mg/kg PRG:

1. Does not adhere to the health-based toxicity criterion benchmark set by California²
2. Is susceptible to high uncertainty based on the values for several exposure factors used
3. Does not accurately reflect our current understanding of risks to children from lead

1 "FEMA doubles down on its decision to not test soil as part of cleanup." *Los Angeles Times*. February 15, 2025. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-02-15/fema-defends-fire-cleanup-strategy-soil-testing-backlash>

2 Jim Carlisle, Kathryn Dowling. *Development of Health Criteria for School Site Risk Assessment Pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 901(G): Child-Specific Benchmark Change in Blood Lead Concentration for School Site Risk Assessment*. 2007. <https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/downloads/crnrr/pbhhgv041307.pdf>.

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IS EVERYONE AT HIGH RISK?

A PRG of 55 mg/kg is a soil remediation level below which no further action is needed on the site for full use; levels above this should be remediated. These values are intentionally designed to protect children; adults who have less exposure to soil will have lower risk. The exposure assumptions are for exposed soil; if there is ground cover, or if there is fresh topsoil, exposure will be lower.

If you have other potential sources of lead where you live (for example, lead-based paint), additional analysis is required:

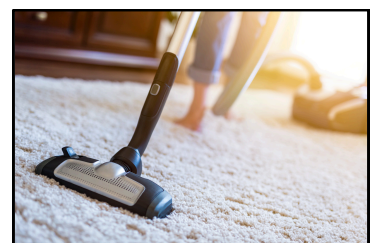
This PRG does not account for other potential exposures in a residence. If there are other sources, a site-specific risk assessment may be warranted, as noted by DTSC:

"Because the lead benchmark dose is an incremental change in blood lead, background exposures to lead, and media other than soil, or dust from the site which may be impacted by lead are not considered in the worksheet. If lead is present in media other than soil (e.g., water, air) or if the home grown produce pathway is anticipated at the site, please contact the HERO toxicologist assigned to the site."

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

In addition to remediating soils, we recommend the following individual actions that can help reduce exposure:

- Wash hands frequently, especially before eating
- Remove shoes when entering a residence
- Clean the paws of pets before entering a residence
- Keep indoor surfaces clean
- Damp wipe dirty surfaces, especially playroom floors, carpets, and foam or rubber mats where children play often
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter



READ THE FULL COMMENTARY

Joseph G. Allen, Parham Azimi, Gen Pei, Lauren Feguson, Lindsey Burghardt, and Kari Nadeau. "Post-fire soil hazards: recommendations for updated soil testing protocols and clearance thresholds." *J Expo Sci Environ Epidemiol* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41370-025-00796-w>. [Read online.](#)