



June 4, 2019

Carla Peterman, Chair
And Commissioners
Commission on Catastrophic Wildfire Cost and Recovery
Governor's Office of Planning and Research
1400 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
Submitted to wildfirecommission@opr.ca.gov

Re: Report to Legislature-reporting drinking water issues related to wildfires

Dear Chair Peterman and Fellow Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of Clean Water Action and our tens of thousands of California members to request that the Commission on Wildfire Cost and Recovery ("Commission") address water contamination and lack of drinking water availability to communities following wildfires in its report to the Legislature. Wildfire frequency and severity is rising in California, increasing the need to make communities more resilient to fire impacts. In addition to person property and lost life, water systems have been compromised and damaged by the fires and residents are forced to rely on bottled water for drinking supplies, without quick relief and at great expense. This is an unacceptable outcome that must be addressed by the Commission and the Legislature.

News articles have demonstrated that, even where water is available after these fires, it is often contaminated with cancer-causing contaminants like benzene and toluene in their drinking water.¹ Cleanup will require expensive treatment options and infrastructure replacement, all while incurring the added expense of living on bottled water. Both Santa Rosa and Paradise are expected to have to make extensive repairs and replacements of water systems, which may add years to recovery efforts while adding an extra layer of costs to those who can least afford it – especially as they rebuild their lives.

More must be done on the front end to fire-harden water utilities in the wildland-urban interface to allow for more resilient systems that can withstand wildfire and allow for an easier return home for wildfire victims. The Commission must include recommendations to the Legislature to increase fire-hardening requirements for water utilities in the wildland-urban interface to better protect the public in the future. Anything less ignores some of the most serious impacts of wildfires on the residents of our state.

Sincerely,


Andria Ventura
Toxics Program Manager

¹Elizabeth K. Wilson, California Wildfires Caused Unexpected Benzene Contamination of Drinking Water, Chemical and Engineering News, (June 29, 2018) available at <https://cen.acs.org/environment/water/California-wildfires-caused-unexpected-benzene/96/i26>; Elizabeth K. Wilson, Benzene Found in the Water Supply of Fire-Ravaged Paradise, California, Chemical and Engineering News, (Apr. 30, 2019) available at <https://cen.acs.org/environment/water/Benzene-found-water-supply-fire/97/web/2019/04>; Associated Press, Cancer-Causing Chemical Taints Water After California Wildfire, (Apr. 30, 2019) available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/cancer-causing-chemical-taints-water-after-california-wildfire-n1000136>.