

LEFT IN RUINS Inside burnt-out LA ghost town a year on from deadly wildfires that destroyed thousands of celebrity homes & killed 12

The US Sun

Its been a year of heartbreak and worry since raging wildfires destroyed 7,000 homes – including those of celebrities like Anna Faris, Miles Teller, and Adam Brody – claimed dozens of lives and displaced nearly 100,000 residents.

The cost of the devastation reached an estimated \$28billion (£18billion).

Rebuilding will take years as corporate construction rumbles on throughout the cleared lots of the abandoned ghost town.

But for stars like Billy Crystal, Paris Hilton and John Goodman, their properties remain only as rubble with no signs of work yet to begin.

The fire-ravaged remnants of Sir Anthony Hopkins' estate stands in an empty lot behind makeshift plywood fencing.

Sir Anthony, 88, snapped up the two adjacent lots in 2018 and 2019 for a total of \$12.6million.

The estate was valued at just \$6.4million when it was put on the market last year, with both plots now being eyed up by developers, according to the Daily Mail.

Elsewhere in the neighbourhood, there are claims that land has been snatched up by Chinese-backed corporations seeking a foothold in one of America's most desirable places.

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<https://uphelp.org/left-in-ruins-inside-burnt-out-la-ghost-town-a-year-on-from-deadly-wildfires-that-destroyed-thousands-of-celebrity-homes-killed-12/> Date: March 6, 2026

Meanwhile the states insurer, known as the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements Plan, has been scrutinized for years over its handling of fire damage claims.

Jonathan Rinderknecht, 29, has been charged with sparking the Palisades Fire. He has pleaded not guilty.

A congressional investigation into the failures that saw the inferno spread at uncontrollable speeds has been ordered by President Donald Trump.

The Palisades fire ignited on January 6, 2024 and ranged for three weeks.

Grass and brush were tinder dry after months with little or no rain.

Firefighting assets were pre-positioned in areas deemed to be at especially high risk for fires.

At 10.30am reports began coming in about a small blaze on a ridge in LA's upscale Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, in the same area where crews had responded to a previous fire on New Year's Day.

Before long, a large plume of dark smoke was visible from miles away.

Shortly after 11am the fire was reported to be about 10 acres, located near Palisades Drive on the coastal neighbourhoods western edge.

Over the next two hours, roads were jammed with motorists trying to flee as flames roared down streets and decimated homes.

Officials issued an evacuation order for the Palisades while warning residents of surrounding areas that they should also get ready to leave.

Meanwhile, another blaze was sparked about 30 miles to the east in Altadena, on the other end of Los Angeles County.

The Eaton Fire started at 6.17pm and all firefighting aircraft in the county were soon grounded because of high winds.

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By 8pm it had doubled in size.

In Altadena, those with homes still standing live in fear of the hazards left behind.

“DANGER: Lead Work Area”, reads a sign on the front door of one house.

The sign warns: “May damage fertility or the unborn child. Causes damage to the central nervous system.”

Ash in the area is a toxic soup of incinerated cars, electronics, paints, and furniture.

House cleaners, hazardous waste workers and homeowners come and go wearing masks, respirators, gloves and hazmat suits as they wipe, vacuum and power-wash homes that weren’t burnt to ash.

Scientists still don’t know the long-term health impacts of exposure to massive urban fires like last years in Los Angeles.

But some chemicals released are known to be linked to heart disease, lung issues and Alzheimers.

Nina and Billy Malone considered their home of 20 years a safe haven before smoke, ash and soot seeped inside, leaving behind harmful levels of lead even after professional cleaning.

Recent testing found the toxin is still on the wooden floors of their living room and bedroom.

They were forced to move back home in August after insurance cut off their rental assistance.

Now Nina, whose neighbours’ homes burned down across the street, wakes up almost every day with a sore throat and headaches.

Billy had to get an inhaler for his worsening wheezing and congestion.

Their insurance won’t pay to retest their home, Billy said, so they’re considering forking out the \$10,000 themselves.

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And if results show there's still contamination, insurance will only pay to clean up toxins that are federally regulated, like lead and asbestos.

Nina said: "I don't know how you fight that.

"How do you find that argument to compel an insurance company to pay for something to make yourself safe?"

Data shows dangerous lead levels still in homes across the region.

According to a report by the Eaton Fire Residents United, a volunteer group formed by residents, six out of 10 homes damaged from smoke still have dangerous levels of cancer-causing asbestos, brain-damaging lead or both.

Experts believe the lead, which can linger in dust on floors and windowsills, comes from burned lead paint.

The University of Southern California reported more than 70 per cent of homes burnt in the Eaton Fire were built before 1979, when lead paint was common.

Paediatrician Dr Lisa Patel, executive director for the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health said: "For individuals that are pregnant, for young children, its particularly important that we do everything we can to eliminate exposure to lead."

The same goes for asbestos, she added, because there is no safe level of exposure.

Julie Lawson paid about \$7,000 out of pocket to test the soil in their Altadena home, even though their insurance company had already agreed to pay to replace the grass in their front yard.

They planned to test for contaminants again once they finished remediating the inside.

They will be living in a construction zone for years at vast cost.

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Julie said: “We have to live in the scar. We’re all still really struggling.

“This isn’t over for us.”

Annie Barbour with the non-profit United Policyholders has been helping people navigate the challenges.

This includes insurance companies resisting to pay for contamination testing and industrial hygienists disagreeing on what to test for.

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