

FAQS: HOW REALTORS® CAN ASSIST RENTERS AFFECTED BY WILDFIRES

REALTORS® are experts at thinking outside the box and finding creative solutions to housing needs. After a natural disaster, this skill set is paramount. Your homeowner clients may be in need of temporary housing while they rebuild or search for a new home. Rental clients may be searching for replacement properties if their rental property was damaged or destroyed. Both homeowners and renters may wonder how and when to return to partially impacted homes. Below, you'll find the answers to your top questions about working with renters after a wildfire.

How can REALTORS® help displaced clients find temporary housing?


- Your C.A.R. member benefits include complimentary access to [Rental Beast Gateway](#), a rental property MLS. On this platform, REALTORS® can list and search rental properties.
- 211LA is partnering with Airbnb.org, American Express, and Hilton to coordinate [free emergency housing](#) for those displaced by the wildfires.
- [Rentspre](#) will refund application fees of those displaced by the wildfires. Email support@rentspre.com after submitting your application. This offer is good through 4/08/2025.
- The Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles has created this [database](#) of available apartments for victims of the Los Angeles wildfires.
- Members of the Hotel Association of Los Angeles are offering [discounted rates](#) for victims of the wildfires.
- [Red Cross service sites](#) provide emergency shelter. You can also locate FEMA shelters and other emergency assistance for immediate needs on the US Government's [DisasterAssistance.gov website](#). The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services also maintains this list of open shelters.
- Above all, leverage your vast network and collaborate with your peers to connect housing seekers and housing providers in your spheres of influence.

How can REALTORS® assist clients with renters' insurance issues?

- Direct them to C.A.R.'s Consumer Fact Sheet [7 Essential Steps to Navigate Insurance After a Wildfire](#) and [A Renter's Guide to Recovering from the California Wildfires](#), both of which have comprehensive tips on insurance issues for renters.
- The nonprofit advocacy group United Policyholders created [this guide](#) to help renters access insurance benefits.
- If you've represented a client on their home that is now fire damaged, review your photos, videos and written descriptions of the property to see if you can help them create their inventory list for the claims process.

How can renter clients determine the rent/fees owed on a partially damaged dwelling, or if it's safe to return to?

- LAist has written this comprehensive [overview of renters' questions](#) about wildfire recovery, including questions on housing providers' responsibilities regarding the cleanup of damaged units.
- Questions about paying rent on a partially damaged unit or receiving the security deposit back on an uninhabitable unit? The LA County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs has prepared this [Q & A](#) for post-disaster renters' issues.
- Restoring a dwelling to habitability after a wildfire is typically the housing provider's responsibility. However, a renter may have questions about garbage disposal, food safety, and other cleanup issues following a wildfire. The Los Angeles Department of Public Health has created this guide, [Returning Home After a Fire](#).

- 
- If their belongings are damaged by smoke, your clients' renters' insurance should help them find a smoke remediation specialist. Home restoration expert Bob Vila has written this guide to [removing smoke odors](#) from the home.

How can REALTORS® help clients avoid price-gouging and scam artists following wildfires?

- Direct them to C.A.R.'s Consumer Fact Sheets, [What You Need to Know About Price-Gouging After a Natural Disaster](#) and [Protect Yourself After a Disaster: Essential Tips to Avoid Scams and Fraud](#).
- Los Angeles County has enacted a series of laws to protect renters from price-gouging following the wildfires, which are summarized on the Los Angeles County Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA) [website](#):
 - New and Existing Rentals: **Landlords cannot increase rental housing prices by more than 10% of the previously charged price** or advertised price following a declaration of emergency. For rental housing not previously rented or advertised, the price cannot exceed 160% of the fair market value established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As of February 4, 2025, there is a special exception in [certain zip codes only](#). The price gouging law has been suspended in those zip codes if the property is: 1) a single-family home of four bedrooms or more, 2) has neither been rented nor offered for rent within one year prior to January 7, and 3) the HUD FMR for a four-bedroom unit is or exceeds \$5,500. LA County housing providers must follow the LA local price gouging ordinance until July 31, 2025, with possible extensions thereafter.

- Daily Rentals: For daily rental housing like VRBO or Airbnb listings, the daily price cannot be increased by more than 10% following the declaration of an emergency. If these properties were previously rented on a daily basis and switch to full-time or monthly rentals after the declaration, the rental price cannot exceed 160% of the fair market value established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- State, County, and local tenant protections remain in place and in some instances may be more restrictive/protective than applicable price gouging protections. Contact DCBA to learn more.
- A landlord cannot justify an unlawful price increase by offering additional services like gardening, cleaning, or utilities, or by offering a shorter lease term.
- Landlords cannot charge a higher rate simply because an insurance company is willing to pay it.
- The law considers it a separate misdemeanor for a landlord to evict a tenant and re-rent the property at a rate prohibited by anti-price gouging statutes.

What are the consequences of violating price-gouging rules after the recent wildfires?

- Housing providers and REALTORS® who assist them are subject to civil and criminal charges if they flout anti-price-gouging laws. The Attorney General has already charged several individuals and initiated dozens of investigations into price-gouging following the wildfires. In addition, REALTORS® are subject to licensing action by the Dept. of Real Estate if they are found guilty of wrongdoing.
- To report an instance of price-gouging, use the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs [online reporting tool](#).

How can my clients and I stay up-to-date on new developments in LA County's wildfire recovery process?

- For comprehensive information on recovery updates in LA County, visit the county's dedicated wildfire recovery website, [LA County Recovers](#).
- Visit [Smart Zone's California Wildfires Resources](#) page for new developments impacting real estate and resources for clients.
- For general questions regarding client work and transactions, contact [C.A.R.'s Legal Hotline](#).
- For general inquiries on wildfire recovery, contact C.A.R. at LAFires@car.org.

What type of financial assistance is available for renters impacted by the wildfires?

- Renters are eligible for [FEMA assistance](#), which may pay for "short-term lodging expenses, costs for renting temporary housing, and the costs of replacing or repairing a vehicle and other necessary personal property. FEMA may also be able to help pay for uninsured medical, dental, childcare, moving and storage expenses."

- Los Angeles County has created a [Funding and Resource Portal](#) with links to funding sources for immediate needs and those experiencing job loss or the loss of business due to the wildfires.
- The National Association of REALTORS® Relief Foundation has been a lifeline for disaster-impacted communities, providing housing-related assistance to those in need. Funded by the generosity of REALTORS®, associations, and industry partners, this grant offers vital support to rebuild lives after disaster strikes. Clients may be eligible for a grant of up to \$1,000 from the REALTORS® Relief Fund. The application process will begin Feb. 10, 2025. Details will be available [here](#).

