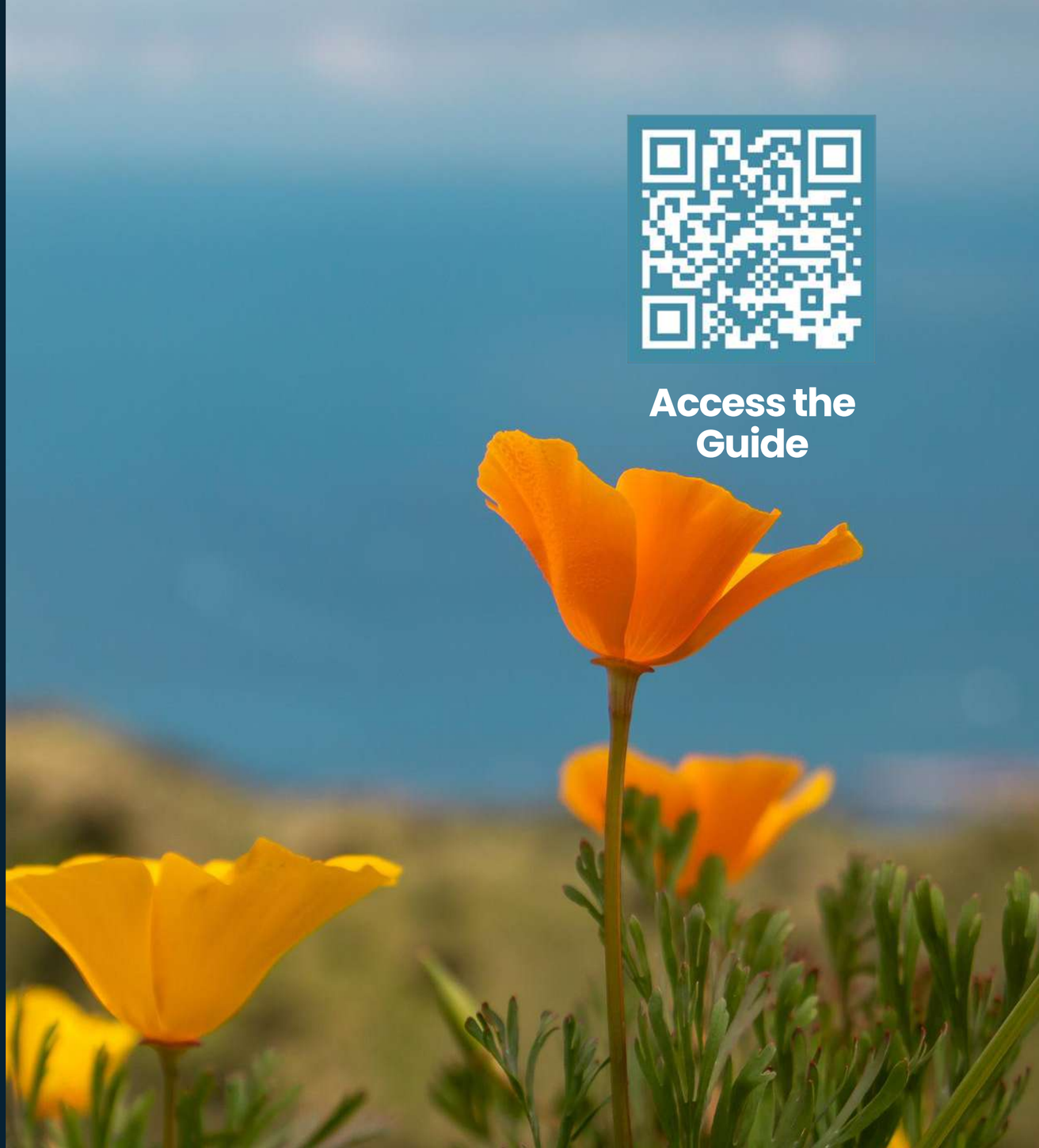
California Rebuilding Guide

CA Masonry Conference

May 9th, 2025



Access the Guide

Our vision for the future

Transforming California into a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable place, for all.

Our Mission

Transforming California through the built environment into a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable place for all.

Our Website

Leading

Inspiring leaders throughout our communities to take action on climate change, public health, and environmental justice.

Educating

Developing and empowering a diverse talent pipeline through training, mentorship, and direct engagement.

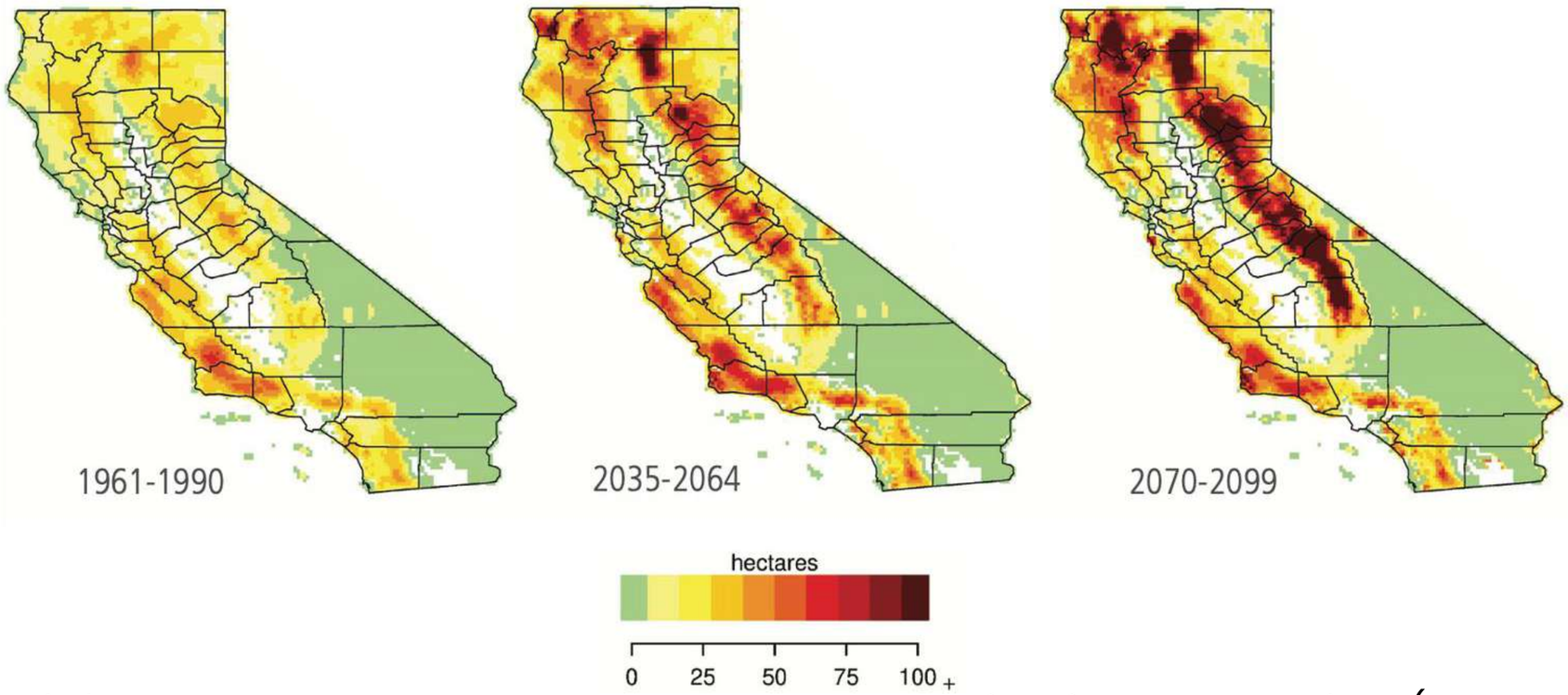
Connecting

Convening interdisciplinary perspectives and collaborating to create positive systemic change.

Advocating

Promoting innovative and impactful policy solutions to address the urgent environmental and social challenges of our time.

California Wildfire Trend



This image shows the modeled area burned by wildfres from current time (modeled as 1961-1990), for mid-century (2035-2064), and for late century (2070-2099). By the end of the century, California could experience wildfres that burn up to a maximum of 178% more acres per year than current averages.

Source: California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment - California's Changing Climate 2018

Wildfire Defense Education

Green Rebuilding Initiative

Community workshops & Free assistance to homeowners affected by the Thomas and Woolsey fires

Group, Training, and Resources

- **Advisory Group with local experts**
- **Wildfire Defense Toolkit for homeowners**
- **Professional Training for landscapers and contractors**

New courses, platform, and unification

- Spanish Courses launched
- LMS launched
- Home Retrofit Tours in person
- Statewide expansion
- RFP for statewide trainers

2018-2019 | 2020-2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025

Wildfire Defense Ed. & Tours Program

Educational workshops, panel discussions with experts and tour of firewise properties

Expansion & Partners

2023 Training sponsored by SoCalGas

Awarded CAL FIRE Grant for 3 years to expand the Wildfire Defense Training & Tours

What is next?

- Ongoing classes and tours
- Updates to training content
- Rebuilding Guide
- Community workshops
- Statewide expansion

Wildfire Resources Landing Page

Wildfire Defense Rebuilding Support and Recovery Resources

After the 2025 Los Angeles Regional Fires, we stand alongside fire-affected communities on their path to healing and recovery. Together, we can rebuild what was lost—homes, landscapes, and hope. Visit our Wildfire Defense Rebuilding Support and Recovery Resources page to access tools, join workshops, and connect with experts in green rebuilding and resilience.

WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY →

usgbc-ca.org/wildfire-defense-rebuilding

Matchmaking to Support Green Rebuilding Efforts

The rebuilding process after a wildfire is a collective effort, and your contribution—whether it's a need, resource, or expertise—can make a significant difference. If your community needs support or you have valuable resources, materials, or knowledge to share, we invite you to fill out the forms on the right. Our goal is to connect those in need with the resources and professionals that can help build more sustainable, resilient communities.

What do you or your community need?

Are you in need of resources for your home or community?

To get more information on green rebuilding strategies, wildfire-resistant materials, landscapes, or anything your fire-affected community needs, click to fill out the form below.

FILL OU

CURSO A CUALQUIER HORA

Defensa contra Incendios para Profesionales de la Construcción

- Rebuilding Guide
- Wildfire Defense Home Hardening Toolkit for Homeowners
- Matchmaking with resources and professionals
- Professional Directory

Resources for Rebuilding: **Matchmaking**

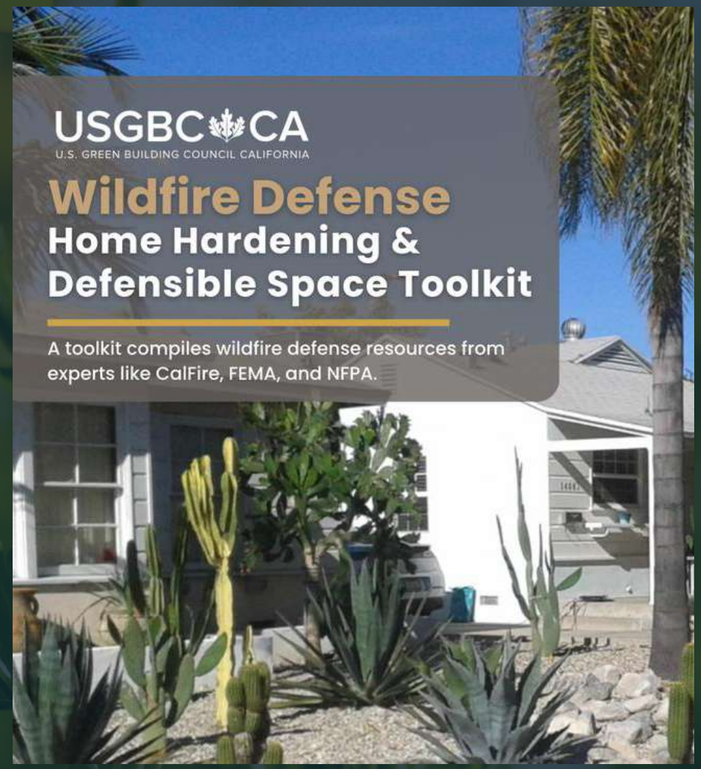
By Needs - Homeowners, contractors on behalf of homeowners may apply

By Expertise - Volunteer professionals apply to provide technical asssitance

By Resources - Organizations donate resources for a green rebuilding

Learn More

- Community Assistance **In-person Workshops**
- Leverage exisiting Wildfire Defense Toolkit for Homeowners to develop a **2025 Homeowners Toolkit** with updated resources
- **Rebuilding Certificate Program** for Contractors
- Retrofit **BuildSMART trailer** to showcase fire resilient building strategies



U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL CALIFORNIA

Wildfire Recovery + Rebuilding Community Workshop

Santa Monica Business Park
3250 Ocean Park Blvd, Santa Monica, CA

Sat, May 10
10 AM - 2 PM PT

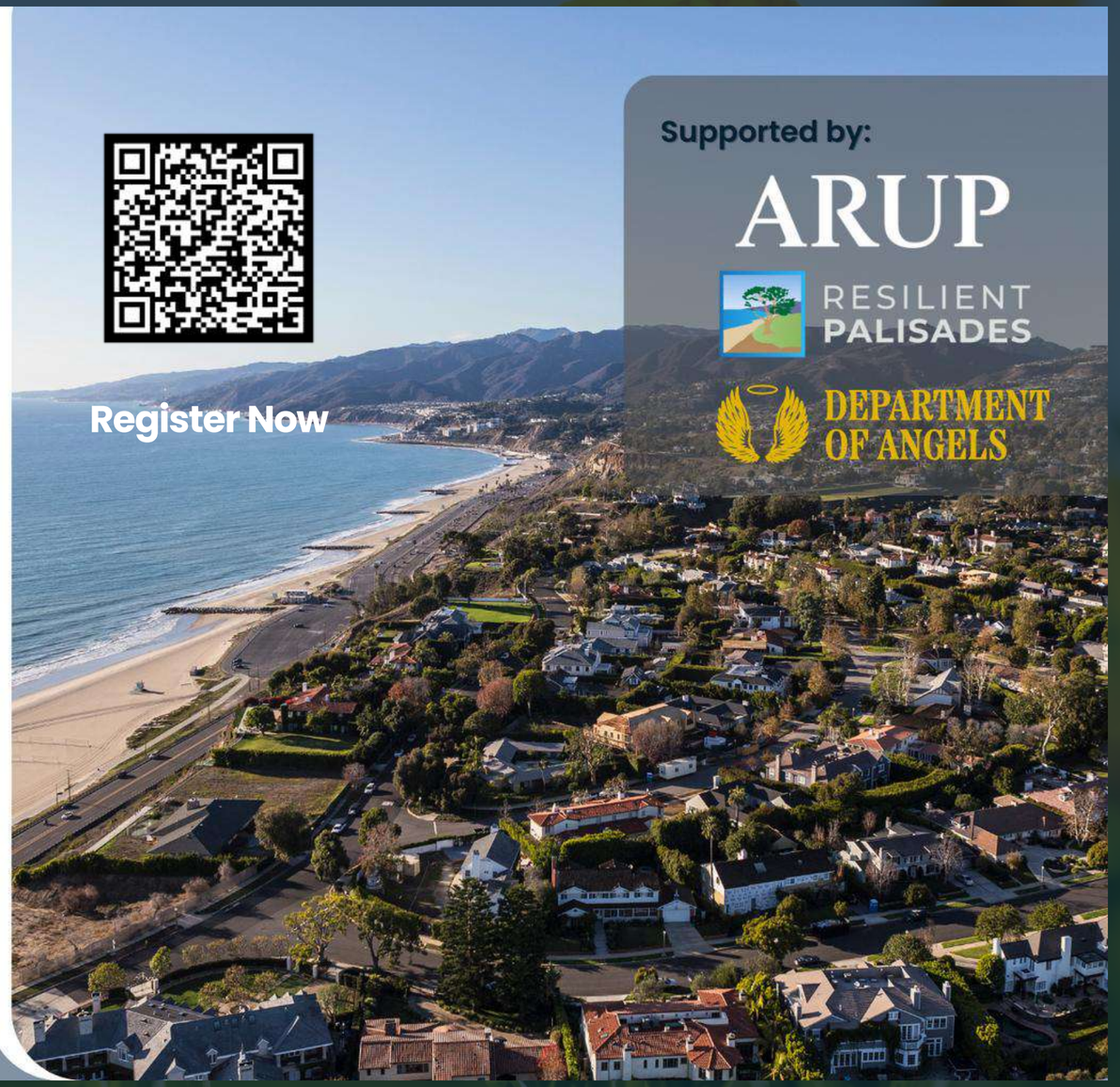
Register Now

Supported by:

ARUP

RESILIENT PALISADES

DEPARTMENT OF ANGELS



USGBC CA
U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL CALIFORNIA

ARUP

California Wildfire Rebuilding Guide

A guide to rebuilding stronger, safer, and more resilient structures.

April 2025

Access the guide

usgbc.ca/rebuildingcalifornia

Version 1.0

- An updated version with incentives planned for early summer

Table of Contents

CA

What's good?

How to read this guide

Reducing wildfire damage risk is the core of what's included in this guide.

While response during an event is important, the building and landscape design should focus on making things safe without requiring much effort from you (i.e., **passive design**).

What improves fire performance

Wildfire risk mitigation strategy types:

Passively prevent accumulation of fuel like leaves
e.g., roof geometry

Actively prevent accumulation of fuel
e.g., tree maintenance (requires occupant action)

"Harden" your home's exterior with **non-combustible building materials**
e.g., non-combustible roof covering

Passively prevent landing place for embers
e.g., roof geometry

Passively limit ember entry
e.g., mesh over vents

Actively prevent ember entry
e.g., close windows and doors

Reducing wildfire risk **and what?** There's more to high performance design - these tags help distinguish other benefits to consider in how you build back.

Co-benefits to consider

Savings

Tagged **IF** design choice reduces first costs or operational costs:

- **Material costs** (e.g., equipment, products, availability)
- **Labor costs** (e.g., installation)
- **Operational costs** (e.g., energy use, ongoing maintenance)
- **Durability** (e.g., less susceptible to leaks, equipment with longer life spans, etc.)

Safer

Tagged **IF** design choice will either help protect occupants through or reduce damage from other hazards (direct and indirect) like:

- **Airborne contaminants** (e.g., smoke, dust, fumes, etc.)
- **Earthquakes**
- **High winds**
- **Heat waves**
- **Mudslides**
- **Heavy rain & flooding**
- **Power outages**
- **Utility water disruptions**

Sustainable

Tagged **IF** design choice will simultaneously achieve any of the following:

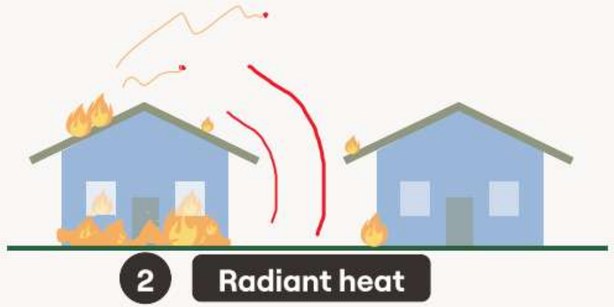
- **Healthy indoor environments** (e.g., through materials and system choices, protecting your family's health)
- **Energy efficient, high performance buildings**
- **Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** (e.g., support solar panels)
- **Low embodied carbon**
- **Support biodiversity and ecological health**
- **Sustainable water use** (i.e., capture, conservation, efficiency, re-use)

Key Concepts

How do houses catch on fire?

1 Direct flame contact

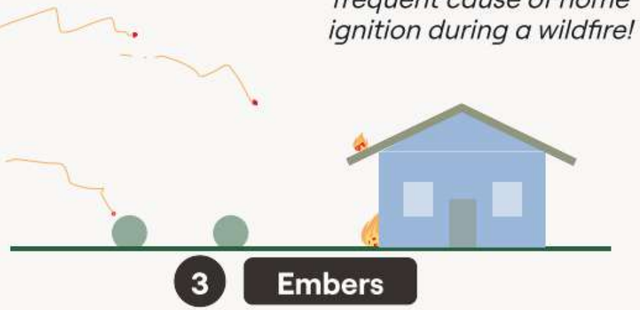
Fire spreads when flames touch materials that can burn (e.g., dry vegetation, wood shingles). Wind, such as the Santa Ana Winds, makes this happen much faster.



2 Radiant heat

There doesn't have to be a flame for materials to catch fire - just heat can do it. Wildfires can reach over 2,000°F. For comparison, wood ignites at 570°F.

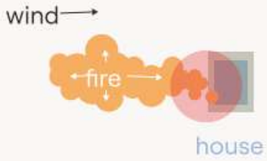
Embers are the most frequent cause of home ignition during a wildfire!

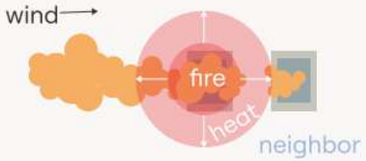


3 Embers

Fires create embers that the wind can blow for long distances. When these embers land on plants, roofs, or walls that can catch fire, they can start new fires far away. That's why this guide will explore many ways to be "ember-resistant."

Bird's eye view:





windblown embers
can travel miles, starting new fires, which can then *further* spread any of these 3 ways

Key Concepts

What do these different material terms mean?

Combustible

Combustible materials can ignite and burn.

Example: wood

Ignition-resistant

Flame-resistant

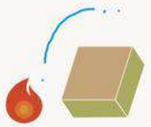
Fire-resistant

These are similarly-sounding terms that typically mean the fire performance has been tested and meet the requirements for the classification (e.g., fire retardant treated, Class A).

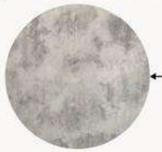
Example: fire-treated wood

Dricon fire retardant treated (FRT) wood. Image source: Tague Lumber / taguelumber.com

Non-combustible



Non-combustible materials, when exposed to fire or heat, will not ignite, burn, or release flammable vapors. A non-combustible material is, by nature, ignition and flame resistant.



Example: concrete

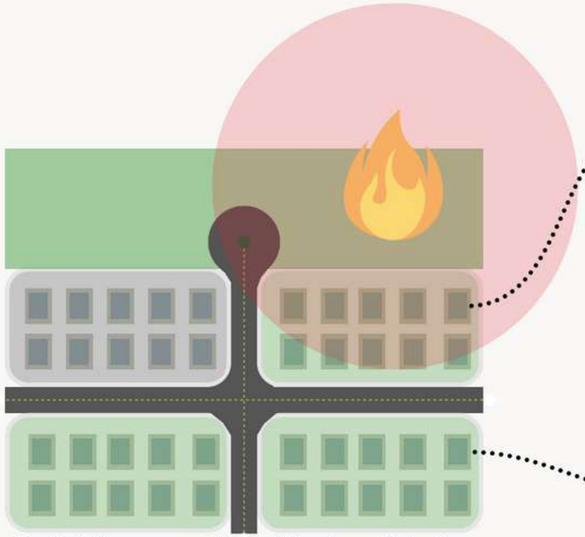
Rated construction assemblies, such as the "1-hour fire-rated wall assembly," consist of tested materials like fire-resistant drywall (Type X gypsum board), studs, and insulation. These components collectively slow the spread of fire, as indicated by the one-hour rating, providing crucial time for firefighting efforts.

For more information on **materials**, please check out FireWise's guide:

FireWise Construction: Site Design & Building Materials

Key Concepts

What should my performance goals be when I think about design?



Aerial diagram of neighborhood during an active fire

Fire-ready

What does this mean? **What should we be aiming for?**

In the next fire, if your home is IN an evacuation zone:

1. **Be able to safely and quickly evacuate** meaning you should be able to grab key documents and not be obstructed from physically leaving.
2. **Have a home to return to** because your home and neighborhood were designed and maintained to slow the rate of fire spread, enabling emergency responders to contain the fire quickly.

If outside of an evacuation zone, in addition to 1 and 2 above:

3. **Be able to manage through smoky air conditions,** noting that burn area smoke can travel long distances.
4. **Be able to manage through power outages** like public safety power shut offs (PSPS).
5. **Be ready for a water service disruption**

AND Prepared for other hazards

Wildfires aren't the only danger we need to worry about in Southern California. We need to design homes and neighborhoods to withstand a range of threats, like earthquakes, extreme heat, and flooding. Many of the hazards in California are linked together. For example, drought cycles dry out vegetation, which provides fuel for wildfires. After the fires, bursts of heavy rain can trigger mudslides in the burned areas, where slopes are missing the stabilization provided by roots of healthy plants. **Fortunately, strategies to boost resilience against one hazard often help with others and enhance everyday performance.**

AND High-performing

What is a high-performing, green building? It's all about sustainability and efficiency. These buildings have lower operational costs, lower carbon emissions, and are energy efficient. They use healthy materials and create indoor environments that **not only benefit human health but also support the health of the surrounding ecosystem**. To achieve this, architects and builders often turn to established rating systems and guidelines, such as Passive House, LEED for Homes, and Enterprise Green Communities. These frameworks help ensure that buildings are designed with both people and the planet in mind.

FAQs

To Guide Your Way Back Home

Building back a home in your original footprint is the best way to expedite your rebuild, but what exactly does that mean?
Permitting requirements and building rules differ by municipality. Check the official resource for your area for exact guidance. Here are some for the regions impacted by the 2025 LA Wildfires:

- LA County
- LA City
- Pasadena
- Sierra Madre
- Malibu

Note: references linked here are specific to LA County code. Various cities will have different municipal Title Sections.

What is "like-for-like" rebuild, and what does 100% + 10% guidance mean?

"Like-for-like" is a zoning code term set by LA County (defined in Chapter 22.256 - Disaster Recovery). Building owners are permitted to rebuild a like-for-like structure to replace their destroyed home so long as it is the same size, in the same location, and for the same purpose as the previous building. Such structures should be modified to be built to current Building Code (Title 26) and Fire Code (Title 32), and can also have a different internal layout (or be rebuilt smaller than the original structure) but cannot increase the overall floor area, size, or height by more than **+10%** or **+200 sqft** (whichever is greater) of the original building.

To be clear, "like-for-like" is related to planning and zoning approvals - *not* building code compliance. For larger homes, a 10% increase in area could have a notable impact on Building and Fire Code requirements.

Example: At most, your building plan can be the same amount of square feet your home was previously *plus* no more than 10%. If your house was 2000 square feet, you could rebuild it to 2,200 square feet without requiring additional permitting.

Does rebuilding my home all-electric have additional permitting considerations? If I had gas before does this go against the 1-for-1 guidance?

If you had gas before, going all-electric does not conflict with "like-for-like" rebuilding guidelines, primarily because like-for-like focuses on maintaining size, footprint, and height of a home, rather than requiring an identical fuel source.

With Mayor Karen Bass's recent Emergency Executive Order No. 5, the City of Los Angeles is working on streamlining approvals for all-electric rebuilds, and LADWP may offer incentives for electric appliances and upgrades. Homeowners should check with LA Department of Building and Safety and LA Department of Water and Power for the latest permitting guidelines and rebate programs in the coming months.

If transitioning from gas, you may need to upgrade your electrical infrastructure and coordinate with utilities to cap and decommission gas lines. While this requires planning, it may also make you eligible for additional rebates and incentives to offset costs. Be sure to consult with the appropriate agencies and professionals to navigate the process smoothly.

CA

Additional Resources

For a Deeper Dive

There are many different organizations, coalitions, and municipalities working on resources to support recovery and rebuilding efforts. We are all committed to working together, aligning our efforts, and collaborating whenever possible to provide the best resources available. Where we can not or are not the right organization to provide specific guidance, we will share additional resources. The references below, which will continually be updated, reflect deeper guidance and additional resources on topics we touch on in this guide, as well as resources from local municipalities and utilities.

Disaster resource website for each municipality

- City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department
- Mayor Karen Bass Emergency Executive Orders
- LA County Recovers
- Malibu Rebuilds

United Policyholders

- A free public resource for insurance questions.

Resources around Wildfire Resilience

- 2022 California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9
- National Fire Protection Association: Firewise USA
- The Governor's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force 2025 Key Deliverables

Project Recovery

- A report by **Urban Land Institute Los Angeles**, **UCLA Ziman Center**, and **USC Lusk Center**, serving as a resource for policymakers, industry leaders, and communities, offering adaptable strategies for strengthening LA's long-term resilience.

Resources by the American Institute of Architects (AIA)

- AIA Roadmap to Rebuilding and Ask an Architect
- AIA Rebuilding After a Fire - extended guidance

High-Performance and Sustainable Home Certifications

- LEED Homes
- LEED Resources
- Passive House Institute
- Enterprise Green Communities

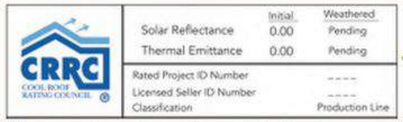
Roofs

Legend Savings · Safer · Sustainable

Design decisions	What improves fire performance	What your options are	Co-benefits to consider

Roof material selection

What **materials** should I use for the roof?



Example of cool roof label

Choose a "cool roof," which reflects more sun and absorbs less heat. Note: for some climate zones, this is a prescriptive requirement (T24 Part 6). ②

- **Cool roofs** reduce energy needed to cool your home, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Less energy used means spending less money** on energy each year.

Key action

Choose a **non-combustible roof assembly**

Choosing a Class A-rated roof assembly, which has a non-combustible covering and underlayment, greatly **reduces the risk of fire by making it less likely for windblown embers to ignite it**. This type of roofing is required in Fire Hazard Severity Zones according to building codes, but it is also helpful in other areas.

Class A roof assemblies follow the standards set by UL 790 or ASTM E108. For example, on a major supplier's website, you can find roofing products by selecting "Fire Rating (UL 790): Class A."①

See additional considerations on the next page

Common Class A roof options

Asphalt shingles

Look for "cool" products - for asphalt, including solar-reflecting granules.

- **Typically lowest cost option** and easiest to install.
- **Renewable energy -** easiest to mount solar panels, no special attachment system needed.

Metal roofing

Select lighter colored metal or paint with a reflective coating.

- **Good performance in strong winds**, long-lasting, and durable. Note: good wind performance is important because high winds can help spread fires - staying on helps protect the roof.
- **Metal does not allow moss growth**, which can cause damage to materials over time.

Clay and concrete tiles ③

Choose lighter color tiles and with a reflective finish. Ensure secure attachment, given this is a heavier material being used in a seismic zone.

- **Lower carbon emissions in manufacturing** (terra cotta/ceramic tiles) compared to metal roofing or asphalt shingles. ④

Fireplace

Legend Savings Safer Sustainable

Design decisions	What improves fire performance	What your options are	Co-benefits to consider

Fireplace

What if I want a **fireplace**?

Choose **electric**, because there's no chimney needed (potential entry point for embers)

Best option: electric

Electric fireplace

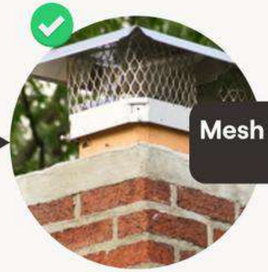
An electric fireplace is a heater that looks and feels like a real fireplace. It uses electricity to create heat with coils and LED lights to make flame effects.

- **Electric fireplaces don't produce smoke, ash, or soot** - which means healthier indoor environments and less pollution leaving your home.
- **No chimney means no heat loss through the chimney -** otherwise chimneys can be where desirable heat is lost or undesirable heat from outside can enter the home.
- **Easier** to clean, don't require fire wood or gas connection.
- **Much safer** given no open flames, smoke, or risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

IF gas **OR** wood (not preferred)

Add a **spark arrestor screen**

Spark arrestor screens are mesh barriers that stop embers from a fireplace fire from getting out. Adding one here is to have a layer of defense against embers getting in, but note that the mesh isn't as fine as you'd really want for ember resistance.



Mesh between 3/8-inch to 1/2-inch

This mesh is **coarser** than what is used elsewhere to protect against embers (meaning it offers **less protection** against them) to ensure proper ventilation from your fireplace. Close damper during fire weather or after each use to protect against ember entry.

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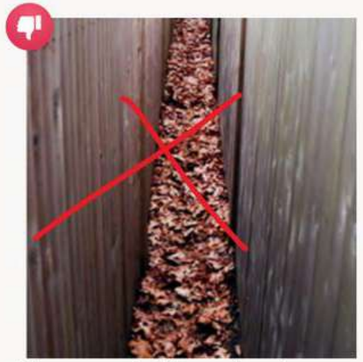
Fences

Legend Savings Safer Sustainable

Design decisions	What improves fire performance	What your options are	Co-benefits to consider

Outdoor space planning

Do I want a **fence**?



If your neighbor also has a fence, avoid doubling up — this is an area that can accumulate leaves and other debris.

Choose a **non-combustible material**

OR

At least make any fencing within the first 5 ft of a building **non-combustible**

Note: this is less desirable from a fire standpoint. Better to select a non-combustible fence everywhere.

Fire resistant fence connection
Image source: City of Ashland / ashlandoregon.gov.

Common non-combustible fence materials

Metal — **Can be recycled**

Concrete

Stone

Brick

Fiber cement

Lower embodied carbon

In all cases, pick **local materials** as much as possible to reduce transportation-related emissions and support the local economy.

Landscaping

Legend Savings · Safer · Sustainable

Design decisions	What improves fire performance	What your options are	Co-benefits to consider

Immediate space around building(s)

How should I design the **first 5 ft** around the home? ①

The first 5 ft are a key buffer zone in reducing your vulnerability to fire.

Key action

Keep area **clear of combustible items**

It's common to have combustible items near buildings, such as wooden furniture, propane tanks, garbage, recycling, plastic garden sheds, or lumber. Make sure your design accounts for these items to be placed somewhere else.

Key action

Hardscaping around structures - no vegetation

Setback fire-resistant vegetation at least 5 ft from all structures.

AND, IF more than 5 ft available

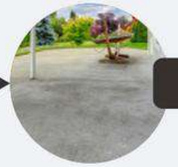
See additional considerations on the next page

Hardscaping options

Gravel

e.g., river rock, decomposed granite

Pervious pavers



Concrete

For all options, **choose light-colored or cool surfaces** to prevent heat gain.

Look for options with **high levels of recycled content**.

Avoid artificial turf. ⑦

Affordable and widely available option.

Lower embodied carbon compared to concrete given less energy-intensive to produce.

Pervious surfaces allow stormwater to infiltrate, supporting irrigation and reducing flooding.

The City of Santa Monica provides a list of approved permeable paving products, check out:

UR_Permeable(1).pdf

Affordable and widely available option.

Helpful on hot days to have light-colored or "cool" surfaces because they reflect heat from the sun instead of absorbing and releasing it.

Recycled content means less waste and more resource conservation.

Managing Fire Together

1 Work together to create **buffer zones and physical fire breaks** around the community.

2 **Help neighbors learn** about and use fire resistant design and construction.

California Wildfire Prevention + Preparation Transdisciplinary Studio course taught by Guillaume Wolf.
Image source: Juan Pasado / artcenter.edu

3 **Work together to actively maintain** vegetation, gutters, roofs and other spaces to limit fuel, such as by having community clearing days and helping those who don't have ability or resources to do it themselves.

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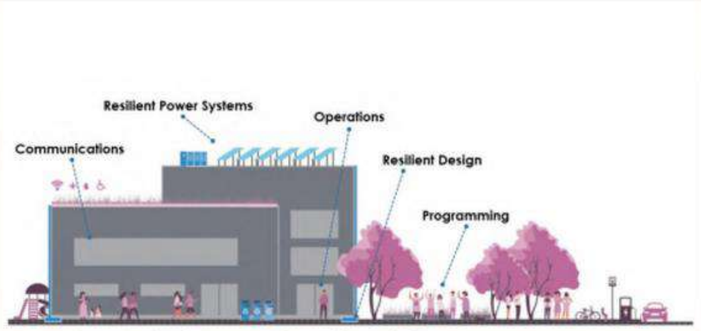
Wildfire risk affects not just one property but the whole neighborhood. This means everyone needs to work together to manage it.

For more information about **banding together as a community** to reduce wildfire risk, see:

NFPA - Firewise USA®

Shared Energy Resilience

Increases in extreme weather will put pressure on the energy grid. **Community-scale energy approaches can keep carbon emissions low while helping communities keep power when the grid goes down.**



An example of a community resilience hub.
Image source: Department of Energy and Environment / doee.dc.gov/

Community Resilience Hubs are facilities that provide resources to communities during emergencies. They can be equipped with backup power for things like heating and cooling during extreme conditions, device and vehicle charging or refrigeration during power outages.

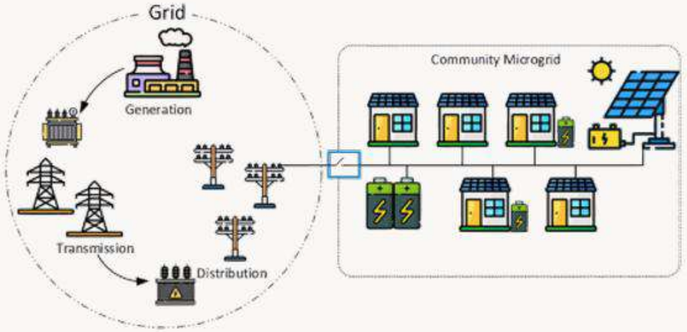
Good candidates are community centers, libraries or local community non-profits.

See resources from Urban Sustainability Directors Network:

Resilience Hubs

Zonal decarbonization refers to neighborhoods that together agree not to use natural gas, limiting the need for the utility to extend or maintain the gas infrastructure. Gas is highly flammable and contributes significantly to climate change.

Communities on the outer edge of gas service can be expensive for utilities to maintain. California SB 1221 requires establishment of zonal decarbonization pilot projects across the state.



A community microgrid.
Image source: RMIT University / communitymicrogrid.net

Community-scale microgrids allow communities to make the most of local clean power resources and disconnect from the grid to maintain power during outages.

They can be paired with local solar and zonal decarbonization approaches to create clean and energy resilient neighborhoods.

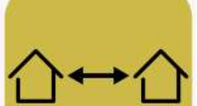
Note: These approaches require working closely with the utilities.

Shared Purchasing Power

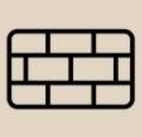
After the fires, many people will be rebuilding at the same time. That puts demand on local supplies and workforces and drives up prices. **Work together to leverage economies of scale** to help reduce overall costs.

Hire architects and contractors together to "mass produce" design and construction.

Share designs to streamline local permitting, especially for alternative approaches like rammed earth, super adobe and straw bale.



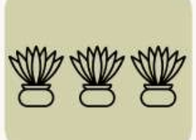
Maximize spacing between buildings to reduce the risk of building-to-building fire spread.



Purchase materials together, including building materials, fixtures, systems, and finishes.

Work with the same modular housing companies to enable establishment of local manufacturing and local jobs.

Consider sharing solar and battery installers. This can help you vet options and may lower costs.



Work with local native nurseries to bulk purchase plant material in advance.

Include diverse, fire resistant plants to support local biodiversity.

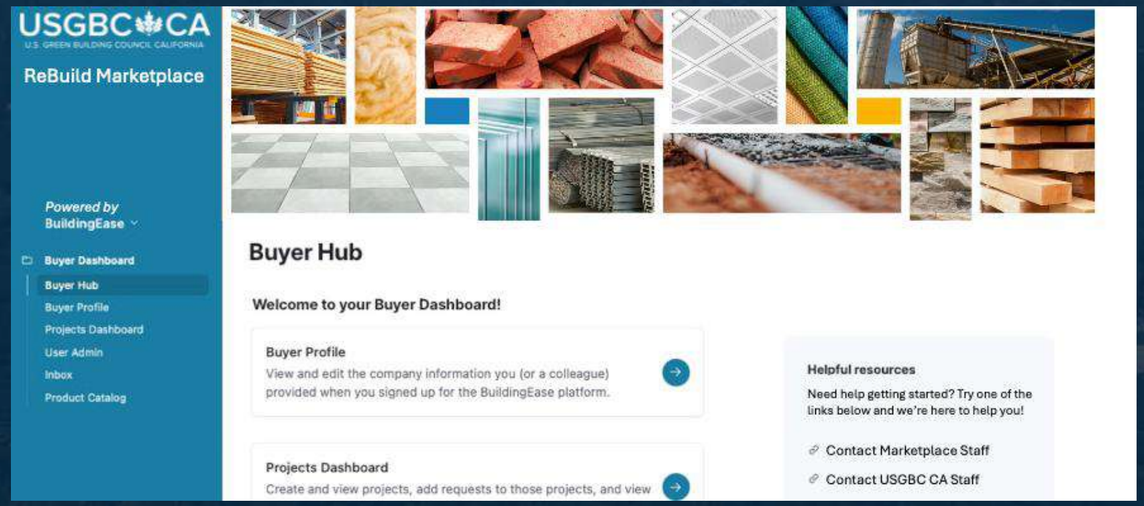
CA

Marketplace & Group Purchasing

An interactive digital tool to provide access to discounted pricing, group purchasing pools, and more.

Target Market 20% of Impacted Homes, or Approximately 3,000 Homes

- Key building materials: concrete, steel, and wood
- Prefab and modular construction units
- Appliances and equipment for high performance, fully electric homes
- Landscape and site, native plants and supplies
- Lower embodied carbon, increased wildfire resilience



Acknowledgements

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California Wildfire Rebuilding Guide

A guide to rebuilding stronger, safer, and more resilient structures.

April 2025

Learn more about USGBC-CA's Wildfire Recovery Resources

Access the guide

usgbc.ca/rebuildingcalifornia

Version 1.0

- An updated version with incentives planned for early summer

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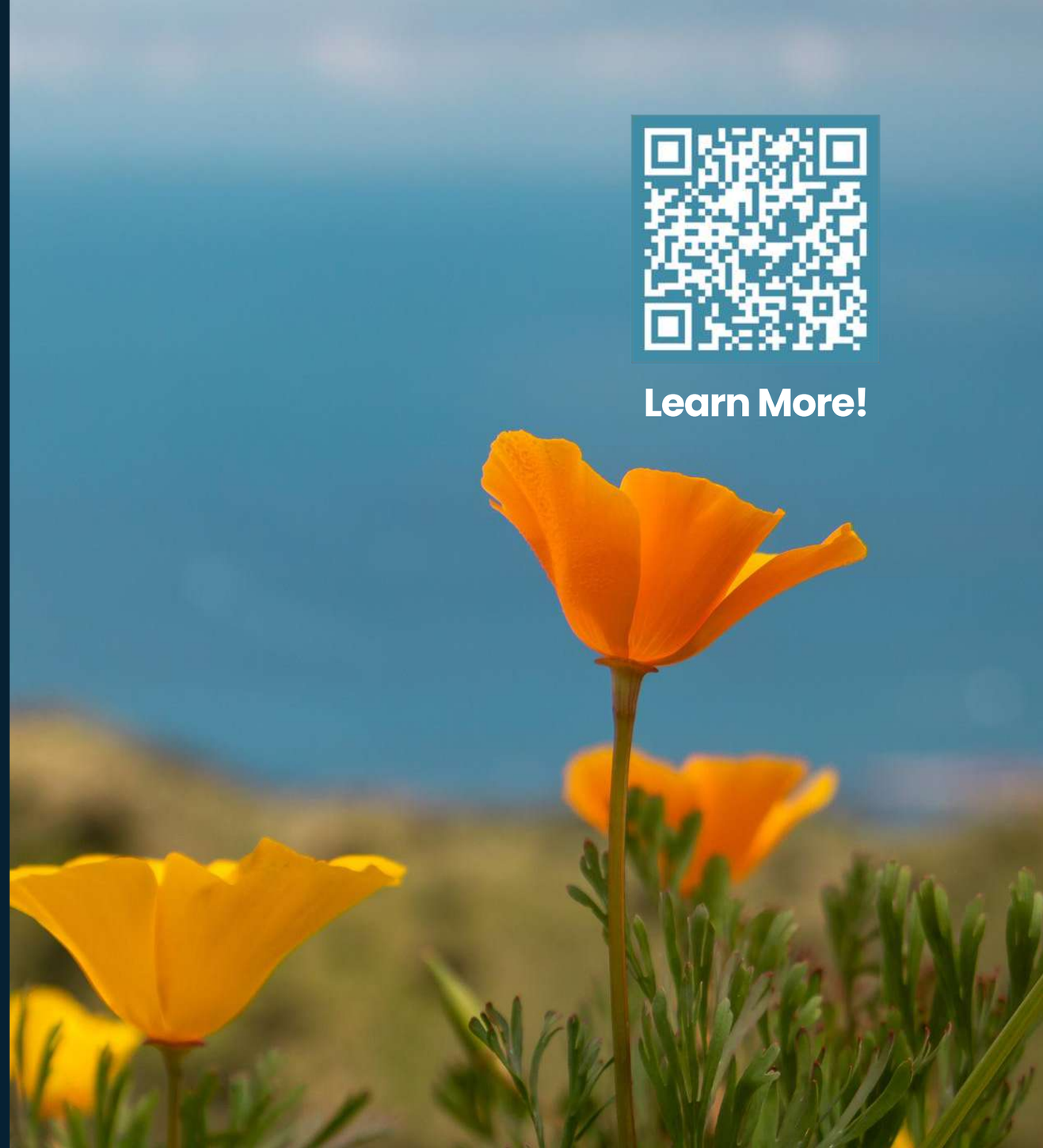
Q & A

Learn More!



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