

# The Ridiculous Reason California Won't Use Sea Water to Put Out Fires

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After nearly two weeks, firefighters in Los Angeles announced Friday that they were seeing the "light at the end of the tunnel" in fighting the blazes that have consumed much of Southern California.

What does this entail? Well, according to The Wall Street Journal, the two biggest fires haven't grown in the past few days; while the Palisades fire was only 31 percent contained early on Friday, the Altadena fire was 65 percent contained. Over 12,000 structures and 40,000 acres have burned; according to the New York Post, 27 are dead and 31 are still missing.

As the fires are being contained, it's worth assessing what went wrong here: How was so much political and professional incompetence allowed to fester and metastasize? Among a litany of other causes, one stands out as particularly dumb in the light of what's happened -- **a refusal to use seawater to fight the fires.** Early in the crisis, Janisse Quiñones, CEO of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, noted that low pressure in three million-gallon tanks was hampering their ability to fight the Palisades blaze. According to the Los Angeles Daily News, she said "*that the first water tank in Pacific Palisades that was tapped by firefighters held about 1 million gallons of water but it ran out of water at 4:45 p.m. Tuesday, and the second tank of 1 million gallons of water ran out of water at about 8:30 p.m., followed by the third tank early Wednesday*" of last week. Quiñones said the blazes "*pushed the system to the extreme,*" and she urged residents to conserve "*because the fire department needs the water to fight fires and we're fighting a wildfire with urban water systems, and that is really challenging.*"

OK, but if you've looked at a map recently, you may have noticed that the Palisades **fire is right by the Pacific Ocean. Why not use saltwater?** There is a reason -- but it's not a terribly good one under the circumstances.

"Firefighters spray blazes with water because it wets and cools down materials that are burning or could catch fire. In that regard, saltwater and fresh water are basically the same," said Michael Gollner, a University of California, Berkeley, fire scientist, the Journal reported on Sunday. "However, when seawater is dumped in an area, it can raise the accumulated salt content of the soil once it evaporates, a process known as **salinization.**" "Too much salt in the soil inhibits plant growth by making it challenging for the roots to absorb water, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Salinization also affects how easily nutrients move through the soil, diminishing the overall fertility of an area. Additionally, salt can be toxic to species that are less salt tolerant, such as some boxwood and dogwood trees."

"**If you add salt to the soil, you're not going to be able to grow anything there the next year,**" said Tim Chavez, a former assistant chief for Cal Fire. "*We try to avoid it, because saltwater is a soil sterilizer.*" Also, the Journal noted, **the saltwater can corrode fire infrastructure, like hoses, pumps, hydrants, tanks, and other equipment.** Understandably, then, officials should try to **avoid it if possible.** This is a situation where "if possible" goes out the window, however.

Consider the cost of the disaster: According to KTLA-TV, the cost of rebuilding Los Angeles is estimated to be somewhere between **\$250 billion and \$275 billion.** We have **dozens of people either missing or dead,** over 12,000 homes and businesses burned to the ground, and 40,000 acres scorched with both of the biggest fires not under control.

"*If you haven't been out there, it literally looks like a bomb dropped,*" Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said on Thursday. "*There are areas right now that we have to hold people away from so our people can do their job appropriately.*"

Thus, if you can stop a bomb being dropped by using a bit of saltwater that might corrode pipes and hoses, **wouldn't that cost a bit less to replace than whole homes and businesses** -- especially because of the fact that U.S. taxpayers are likely on the hook for those costs?

OK, then, what about the plants that won't grow next year. Which one would you rather have, a house with barren soil for a season or two, or a property with a burned-down hull of a home where you can grow your lawn next year? Pretty simple question, no? Also, it's worth noting that this is something that experts have been dealing with previously, thanks to the damage done by road salt. It turns out there are ways of dealing with it.

**"One method to reduce the amount of sodium in soils is to irrigate deeply,"** a 2020 article in the Purdue University Landscape Report%20is,3) read. **"It's generally accepted that six inches of water will leach about 50% of salt accumulations in soil. This equates to approximately 372 gallons per 100 sq. ft. This method can take a significant amount of time and doesn't leach all of the salt to acceptable levels.**

**"The other, and most effective method, is to add Gypsum (calcium sulfate (CaSO4)) to the soil. Gypsum removes sodium by the interaction between the sulfate ions and sodium. The negatively charged sodium ions attract with the positively charged sodium ions, forming sodium sulfate, which is highly leachable from the soil. The calcium leftover from the reaction will bind to soil particles, which will provide aeration to the soil, thus increasing the leaching potential."**

Again, this might be **a minor issue compared to DEI policies in the Los Angeles Fire Department** and the incompetence of various elected officials, including Gov. Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. **It's yet another straw of stupidity** thrown on a very broken camel's back. Angelenos and taxpayers deserve answers from officials once they're done doing their jobs. Explanations must be given and responsibility must be taken for what looks like a concatenation of horrible decision-making during these fires -- including a refusal to use readily available water sources to fight the biggest blaze.