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Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass Issues Executive Order to Waive All-Electric Building Requirement for Rebuilding After Los Angeles Wildfires

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On January 13, 2025, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued Emergency Executive Order No. 1, entitled “Return and Rebuild,” in response to the recent devastating wildfires that destroyed homes and businesses across the city. The Order aims to expedite the rebuilding process for affected property owners by implementing streamlined procedures and, notably, waiving the requirement that all new buildings be fully electric under Los Angeles' All-Electric Building Code.

A key provision of the Order is the suspension of Ordinance No. 187,714, which mandates that all newly constructed buildings in Los Angeles use electricity as their sole source of energy. This requirement—part of the city's broader sustainability and climate goals—would otherwise have applied to homes and businesses being rebuilt after the wildfires. Under the Order, projects meeting the definition of “Eligible Projects” are exempt from the all-electric mandate, allowing property owners to incorporate non-electric energy sources, such as natural gas, in their rebuilt structures.

An all-electric building, as defined by the Ordinance, relies exclusively on electricity for all energy needs, including lighting, space heating, water heating, cooking appliances, and drying appliances. While Eligible Projects are no longer required to comply with this mandate, property owners may still voluntarily choose to build all-electric homes and businesses. Eligible Projects, as defined in the Order, must meet the following criteria:

- The structure or facility being rebuilt is in substantially the same location as it existed prior to the wildfires.
- The new structure does not exceed 110% of the floor area, height, or bulk of the original structure.
- The use of the rebuilt structure remains the same as before the wildfires (*e.g.*, residential cannot convert to commercial).
- Building permits are obtained within seven (7) years of the Order's issuance, and the project is completed within three (3) years of obtaining the permits (with possible extensions).

This waiver is a significant shift in policy, reflecting the city's prioritization of immediate disaster recovery efforts over long-term sustainability goals. It ensures that property owners can rebuild quickly and without the financial or logistical burden of transitioning to an all-electric energy infrastructure during a time of crisis.

Beyond the waiver of the all-electric requirement, the Order establishes a comprehensive framework to accelerate cleanup and reconstruction efforts. Key initiatives include:

- Debris Removal Task Force: A program to streamline debris removal and mitigate post-fire hazards such as flash floods and mudslides.

- Disaster Recovery Permitting Center: A centralized hub in affected areas with representatives from eight city departments to assist residents with permitting and approvals.
- Department Strike Force: A team tasked with identifying and eliminating administrative bottlenecks to ensure an efficient rebuilding process.

The Order also waives the need for demolition permits for structures severely damaged by the fires, provided timely notice is submitted through an online portal. Additionally, rebuilding projects are exempt from discretionary review processes under the Los Angeles Municipal Code, allowing for faster ministerial approvals.

Mayor Bass' decision to waive the all-electric building requirement underscores the city's commitment to addressing the immediate needs of wildfire victims. By temporarily setting aside long-term sustainability policies, the Order removes potential obstacles to rebuilding, enabling property owners to restore their homes and businesses without unnecessary delays. At the same time, it leaves room for individual property owners to opt into the city's clean energy goals voluntarily. This pragmatic approach reflects the urgency of recovery while maintaining flexibility for Los Angeles' broader climate initiatives.

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