



## Community Report Back

### Insurance Town Hall #4: Risk Assessment & Insurability in Pacific Palisades

The fourth and final Insurance Town Hall concluded PRC's four-part series focused on helping Palisadians better understand insurance challenges following the wildfire—and what can be done, individually and collectively, to improve insurability going forward. The session centered on **risk assessment**, bringing together insurance carriers, wholesalers, risk-analytics experts, technology innovators, and public officials to unpack how risk is evaluated and how it can be mitigated.

The Town Hall was organized by **Maryam Zar (Palisades Recovery Coalition)** and **Christina Lillios (Venbrook Insurance Services)**, in collaboration with **Senator Ben Allen's office**, and featured panelists from **AAA Insurance, Burns & Wilcox, Green Shield Risk, and Sonic Fire Tech**.

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### Legislative Context: Home Hardening & Community Resilience

Sophia Liebman from **Senator Ben Allen's office** opened the conversation with an overview of **SB 894**, a newly introduced bill proposing a **state-backed, low-interest loan program for home hardening**. The bill is intended to help homeowners invest in resilience measures that can meaningfully reduce wildfire risk and, over time, improve insurability.

Participants were encouraged to provide feedback on proposed legislation before the February 20 bill introduction deadline, reinforcing the importance of **community input shaping state policy** around wildfire resilience and insurance reform.

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### Understanding the Non-Admitted Insurance Market

Christina Lillios, Executive Vice President of Private Client Services at **Venbrook**, provided an overview of California's evolving insurance landscape—particularly the role of **surplus lines, non-admitted, and E&S (Excess & Surplus) markets**.

She explained the key distinction between:

- **Admitted carriers**, which are tightly regulated and increasingly restricted in high-risk areas, and



- **Non-admitted carriers**, which offer greater flexibility, customized underwriting, and alternative solutions in wildfire-exposed regions like Pacific Palisades.

Christina also introduced **Burns & Wilcox** and **Green Shield Risk** as wholesale partners that help brokers access these non-admitted markets—an increasingly critical pathway for homeowners seeking coverage today.

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## **Burns & Wilcox: Market Conditions & Coverage Pathways**

Heather Turner, Vice President and National Product Leader at **Burns & Wilcox Private Client**, discussed the realities of placing insurance in today’s market, particularly for high-value homes in wildfire zones.

Key insights included:

- While California wildfires contributed to a “hard” insurance market, conditions are beginning to **soften modestly** due to easing inflation and increased capital capacity.
- Insurers are looking closely at **risk management practices**, not just location.
- Homeowners are encouraged to:
  - Work with a **single, trusted broker** rather than shopping coverage piecemeal
  - Choose qualified, well-insured builders
  - Review contracts carefully with legal counsel
  - Be transparent about claims history and mitigation efforts
  - Consider higher deductibles when working with E&S carriers

Heather also reviewed available products such as **Difference-in-Conditions (DIC) policies**, personal article floaters, and excess flood coverage.

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## **AAA: Community-Level Risk Matters**

Geoff Wright, Vice President at **AAA Insurance**, shared how AAA approaches risk assessment as the largest homeowner insurer in Southern California and a member-based organization.

He emphasized that:

- Accurate pricing and underwriting depend on **modernized risk models**
- Insurers increasingly look to **community-level mitigation**, not just individual parcels
- Standards such as **IBHS (Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety)** matter



- Technologies like **automatic water shutoff devices** and fire-resistant construction can influence underwriting decisions

Geoff also acknowledged systemic challenges, including delays in rate approvals and underwriting updates, which limit insurers' ability to offer affordable and widely available coverage in California.

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## Advanced Risk Analytics & Community-Scale Modeling

Patrick Blandford of **Green Shield Risk** and **Property Guardian Solutions** discussed the limitations of current wildfire scoring systems, many of which rely on outdated or overly rigid models.

Green Shield's approach focuses on:

- **Point-of-underwriting risk mitigation**
- Sophisticated analytics used for large, complex properties such as condos, HOAs, hospitals, and campuses
- An MGA program backed by **Lloyd's of London**, offering up to \$10 million in coverage for affluent homeowners in California and Colorado

Patrick noted that their models accurately anticipated wildfire exposure in areas like Pacific Palisades and stressed the need for insurers to better recognize **defensible space, ember resistance, and mitigation investments**—factors often overlooked in automated scoring systems.

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## Technology & Fire Prevention: Sonic Fire Tech

The Town Hall also explored emerging **fire-prevention technologies**, with a presentation on **Sonic Fire Tech**, an acoustic fire suppression system inspired by NASA research.

Daniel Fogelson and Remington (Sonic Fire Tech) explained how the technology:

- Uses acoustic vibrations to disrupt combustion
- Operates autonomously and without water or chemicals
- Aims to provide **early-stage fire suppression** without causing secondary damage



While insurers are still slow to evaluate and integrate new technologies, panelists agreed that innovation will be essential to closing the gap between actual risk mitigation and how risk is currently scored.

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## Builder's Risk, Construction Practices & Materials

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was **builder's risk insurance** and construction standards during rebuilding.

Key takeaways:

- General contractors must carry **proper bonding and insurance** before work begins
- Builder's risk policies are often required but poorly understood
- Rebuilding with **non-combustible materials** and ember-resistant design can meaningfully improve insurability
- Risk is assigned **hyper-locally**, not broadly, due to carrier saturation and diversification constraints

Geoff confirmed that underwriters can and do consider upgraded materials and site-specific mitigation when evaluating individual homes.

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## Closing Themes & Next Steps

The Town Hall reinforced several core messages for the community:

- Insurability is increasingly tied to **risk mitigation**, not just geography
- Individual actions matter—but **community-wide strategies matter more**
- Technology, better analytics, and updated underwriting models are essential
- Policy solutions like SB 894 can help bridge the affordability gap
- Navigating insurance post-disaster requires coordination, transparency, and trusted advisors

PRC thanked all panelists and participants and reminded residents that the **PRC Recovery Workspace** remains available as a hub for builders, architects, and homeowners actively working through rebuilding and insurance challenges.