

News Article: Dust to Ashes: Soil Falls Victim to Forest Fire Research
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Dust to Ashes: Soil Falls Victim to Forest Fire

Research: San Gabriel Mountains blaze destroys a unique collection that scientists had only begun to explore.

By CARA MIA DiMASSA, TIMES STAFF WRITER

One of the casualties of the Williams fire that swept through the Angeles National Forest was a small, pyramid-shaped shed that might be easy to ignore on the list of 62 homes and 14 outbuildings destroyed.

But the underground shed housed strange yet precious cargo: Nearly 1,000 jars filled with dirt collected 67 years ago, a living archive of sorts that in recent years had been a gold mine for soil scientists.

Scientists were surprised to learn that a thin layer of clay particles within soil, called an argillic horizon, takes decades, rather than centuries, to form. With the jars, they had been able to study how pollution affects soil composition. Lead and zinc released into the air, they realized, quickly make their way into the ground.

But when the fire raced through the forest, the collection was lost.

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<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-dirt12oct12.story>