



# UNIONS + GUILDS JOIN FORCES FOR WILDFIRE CLOTHING DRIVE

LOCALS GO ALL-IN AND HANDS-ON  
TO ASSIST MEMBERS AND THE  
COMMUNITY AT LARGE.

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**T**he industry rallied in full force after the devastating wildfires that ravaged parts of Los Angeles in January, amassing an immense amount of critical resources for those who had lost homes and livelihoods. Among the many supportive actions was a clothing drive put together by the Costume Designers Guild (CDG) IATSE Local 892 as part of IATSE's Wildfire Relief efforts.

The drive, held January 9 to February 22, helped outfit anyone in the industry as well as community members of any profession who arrived in need. Clothing was offered to over 1,500 families and individuals thanks to the dedication of hundreds of volunteers including members from IATSE Locals B192, 33, 44, 80, 600, 695, 700, 705, 706, 728, 729, 768, 800, 839, 871, 884, 892; Teamsters Local 399; Basic Crafts; and PGA, DGA, SAG-AFTRA, and WGA.

This was yet another collective effort among unions and guilds to raise awareness for sustainable practices within the industry, with a ripple effect well beyond on-screen depiction and on-set implementation of environmentally responsible behavior and practices.

What set this drive apart was the fact that CDG applied its collective expertise to assessing every piece of donated clothing. Costume designers and costumers trained other volunteers—from key grips to teamsters to writers and performers—on how to determine the suitability of an item and channel it through the sorting pipeline.

“Members, studios, and Angelenos gave generously. Some things weren’t wearable, but we made sure nothing went to waste,” said CDG member Maggie Welsh. “Every day, we moved mountains of clothes. Volunteers sorted each item, asking whether it could be washed, repaired, recycled or reused. What couldn’t be salvaged went to other organizations or into a box for those who needed clothing to wear while sorting through the ashes of their homes.”

“We had over 700 volunteers looking carefully at each piece, making sure everything was something someone would want to wear today, that it wasn’t outdated, that it was clean and without noticeable defects,” said Brigitta Romanov, executive director of the CDG.

If a piece of clothing wasn’t up to standards, it was put into a secondary pile for volunteers to triage. During that stage, items were funneled into piles for cleaning, textile recycling or donation







RECYCLING FOUR  
TONS OF CLOTHING  
INSTEAD OF SENDING  
IT TO A LANDFILL CAN  
SAVE APPROXIMATELY  
88 METRIC TONS OF  
CO<sub>2</sub> EQUIVALENT. IT  
IS COMPARABLE TO  
TAKING NEARLY 20  
PASSENGER VEHICLES  
OFF THE ROAD FOR AN  
ENTIRE YEAR.

to organizations, including costume departments at community colleges and high school theater programs.

Donations were also set aside for EcoSet, a reuse center in Los Angeles where nonprofits, artists, theaters, schools and individuals can receive valuable materials for no cost, including sets, flats, furniture, decor, home goods, lumber, art materials and expendables.

"We did everything we could to make sure clothes weren't going into a landfill," Romanov said.

All told, the drive kept an estimated 100 usable items for every piece put into the recycling pile. But before that pile was sent off, items were washed and checked once again. If the item was able to be completely cleaned up, it would be sorted onto clothing racks for the community to pull from.

Clothing categorized for recycling was sent to Homeboy Threads, an LA-based nonprofit offering reuse and recycling services for apparel and textiles. This organization further examines donated clothing to assess whether it can be repaired for resale.

When the CDG center closed in February, several thousand bags of clothing were donated clothing to charities including the United Farm

Workers Union, Santa Monica College Basic Needs Program, Distribute Aid, St. Josephs Center, Eaton Renewal Project, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Outreach and Project Ropa.

Teamsters 399 provided all transportation, vehicles and tents for the donation center.

Four tons of clothing were sent out for responsible recycling. "That isn't even close to what we upcycled. That amount only represented the unacceptable clothing that couldn't find a home elsewhere," said Romanov. "If we consider the 100:1 good-to-bad ratio, it easily adds up to at least 400 tons of clothing."

This achievement was significant on a number of fronts, not the least of which was educating those who helped with sorting to think twice about what to do with clothing they're ready to part with.

"People ask, 'Why should I want to recycle clothing?' Often, when you give it to Goodwill and it's not pristine or current, that clothing just goes to a landfill," Romanov said. "They do not necessarily have the kind of dedication to sustainability that we would like."

Recycling four tons of clothing instead of sending it to a landfill can save approximately 88 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. It is comparable to taking nearly 20 passenger vehicles off the road for an entire year, not burning 10,000 gallons of gas or growing 2,199 tree seedlings for 10 years.

A lasting impact of this massive effort is the training it provided to help members of unions and guilds make informed, environmentally responsible decisions about how to dispose of their own used clothing.

"Our grounds were packed with clothing," Romanov said. "We helped people understand what was being done with it. We tried really hard to give 700 people that exposure, knowing that we cared to get it recycled, that we didn't want it to go into the landfill."

"Education is important, but when your hands are on it and you're doing it, it resonates even better." ■