

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Debris Removal Program Enrollment/Process

### 1. What is the Consolidated Debris Removal Program?

The Consolidated Debris Removal Program has two phases: removal of household hazardous waste and removal of other fire-related debris including hazard trees.

In **Phase I**, local government, state and federal agencies have organized teams of experts from the California State Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to inspect your property and remove any household hazardous waste (HHW) that may pose a threat to human health, animals, and the environment such as batteries, herbicide, pesticide, propane tanks, asbestos siding, and paints. Phase I is automatic and includes residential properties that have been destroyed by the fires.

In **Phase II**, Cal OES, FEMA, and local officials will coordinate with the State's Debris Task Force to conduct fire-related debris removal from your property if you have elected to participate in the State's program by signing a Right-of-Entry Form.

### 2. What do I need to do?

**Phase I (household hazardous waste):** You do not need to do anything to have household hazardous waste removed from your property. Operations are automatic and already underway.

**Phase II (remaining debris, ash, and hazard trees):** Contact local government officials to get a Right-of-Entry (ROE) form. You will fill out the form to grant government contractors access to your property to conduct the debris removal. Check your local government's website for information on how to obtain the form or visit [wildfirerecovery.org](http://wildfirerecovery.org).

### **3. After I turn in a ROE to my local government, what happens next?**

First, your local government will review your ROE and ensure it has been filled out correctly. It will also cross check property records to verify that you are the property owner. Afterwards, the ROE will be transferred to the State's debris task force for processing and scheduling.

### **4. How will I know if household hazardous waste has been removed from my property?**

The State or Federal HHW contractor will place a stake and laminated sign in front of your property indicating that household hazardous waste has been removed.

### **5. Is the debris removal program only for houses that are completely destroyed?**

This debris removal program is for fire-damaged or destroyed houses. Homes that have mostly burned, but may have walls still standing, may be eligible for the State's debris removal program on a case by case basis. When you submit your Right-of-Entry permit, notify the representative that your structure is not completely destroyed, so your property may be reviewed as quickly as possible. You should also include with your Right-of-Entry permit, a "total loss" letter from your insurance company, if insured.

### **6. What is considered household hazardous waste?**

Household hazardous waste is waste from houses that poses a threat to public health, animals, or the environment. Hazardous waste includes chemicals that are ignitable, toxic, corrosive, or reactive. Examples include pool chemicals, car batteries, antifreeze, used oil filters, solvents, fertilizers, pesticides, propane tanks, disinfectants, aerosols, paint, bleach, and ammunition.

### **7. Are burned electronics and appliances (white goods) included in the household hazardous waste cleanup?**

Teams handling hazardous waste will not remove appliances or electronic wastes, such as TV and computer monitors, computers processing units, or cell

phones. These materials will be removed as part of the overall debris removal process during phase II.

## **8. Why not just have the contractors remove household hazardous waste as part of the general clean up?**

Household hazardous waste must be removed without delay to protect public health and safety. This is an emergency protective measure. Hazardous waste could have significant long-term environmental impacts and should not be combined with the waste from the general clean-up that is going to the landfill.

Removal of hazardous waste from the fire debris prevents these environmental contaminants from polluting the environment, and protects the workers and the public from exposure during debris removal efforts.

Removal crews are specifically certified to handle household hazardous waste.

## **9. When will my debris be cleared?**

Crews have already begun removal of hazardous household waste across the State. Removal of fire debris, other than hazardous household waste, is scheduled to begin in December of 2020.

There are a number of factors that determine when your lot will be scheduled for debris removal. The local government sets priorities within the community, such as properties that are near public use facilities and areas with sensitive receptors, such as schools, parks, and nursing homes. Secondly, they prioritize areas that are a threat to the environment, such as near creeks and other bodies of water. To maximize efficiency, the State will schedule the properties as best they can in groups to maximize efficiency and overall productivity to restore the communities as quickly as possible.

## **10. What is soil testing? Why is this being performed, and how? Who tests the soil?**

Crews scrape 3 – 6" of soil from the ash footprint and samples are sent to a state-approved lab for analysis. The results are compared against background samples taken from areas in the vicinity that are not directly impacted by fire to ensure that all contaminated ash was removed. If necessary, more soil is removed and the site is retested until it comes back clear of contaminants or it is

determined the contents of the soil are consistent with the background levels of similar soil on a property. All soil testing results are returned to the State's Debris Task Force for final review and validation.

### **11. After debris clearance and soil testing, what are the next steps?**

Once the State's Debris Task Force has ensured that contractors have removed all debris and soil testing meets California state standards, contractors will return to install erosion control methods. The State's Debris Task Force will then report to your local government that your lot is clear. Your local government will then notify you that your property is safe and ready for rebuilding.

### **12. Once the household hazardous waste is removed by the State or federal contractor, can property owners hire their own contractors to remove the remaining debris?**

Yes. If you decide to remove fire-related debris from your property, you must obtain all the necessary permits and environmental clearances from your local government before your contractors start any work. This option is often referred to by your local government as the "Opt Out" program.

### **13. I own a private-non-profit or a commercial property and it was damaged in the fire, is my property eligible?**

These properties may be approved by the State on a case by case basis. The State will consider the commercial property owners ability to cause the work to be performed and whether the debris on the property presents an immediate threat to the health and safety of the community.

## **Health and Safety**

### **14. My house was destroyed in the fire. Can I go back onto my property to see if I can find any valuables or mementos?**

Safe sifting through your property will NOT jeopardize your claims for disaster assistance. Property owners who desire to search debris for possible salvageable items should do so with caution and with proper protective gear: eye protection, masks, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants. Residents should

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### **Frequently Asked Questions: Private Property Debris Removal Program**

minimize contact with fire debris, which may contain materials that can be hazardous to your health. For more information, visit your local government public health website:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR18-056.aspx>

[https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/Fire\\_Emergency\\_Guidance\\_FS\\_1.pdf](https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/Fire_Emergency_Guidance_FS_1.pdf)

### **15. Can residents be present during the clean-up of their personal property?**

Yes, if they request to be present; however, exclusion zones will be established surrounding the work area to ensure safety and property owners may not enter these zones during debris removal. The safety of the general public and workers is a priority during debris operations. To prevent safety hazards, the public is encouraged to stay away from areas where debris removal operations are underway.

### **16. How is the State's Debris Task Force protecting our rivers, streams, and aquifers from contamination?**

The State's Debris Task Force will use erosion controls on the site as well as use silt collection devices around storm drains to minimize impacts to rivers, streams, and the aquifers. They are also taking measures such as wrapping the debris in trucks to minimize particles traveling from the air to the water.

### **17. Who ensures compliance with worker safety regulations?**

The State's safety professionals and contractor safety professionals ensure work complies with all OSHA, Cal/OSHA standards.

### **18. What safety and environmental regulations are contractors required to comply with?**

Contractors are required to comply with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations regarding safety and the environment. Whenever there is a conflict between codes or regulations, the most stringent regulation is applied.

## Payment and Insurance

### 19. Who will pay for the debris removal?

All upfront costs will be paid by state and federal agencies. However, if property owners have homeowner's insurance covering debris removal, owners must inform local officials by indicating that coverage on their ROE. Homeowners will be required to remit that portion of their insurance proceeds specifically reserved for debris (see additional clarification below).

### 20. If I have homeowner's insurance, can I still participate in the debris removal program?

Yes. However, to avoid a duplication of benefits provided by the state or federal government, your insurance company will be required to provide payment from your policy designated for debris removal to the government. (See additional clarification below)

### 21. What portion of my homeowner's policy will the local government collect for debris removal?

It depends on the policy that you have. There are generally two types of debris removal coverages in a homeowner's insurance policy:

- Specified Amount: If your homeowner's insurance policy contains a separate, debris-specific clause, the local government will only collect the specified amount designated in the debris removal clause. These clauses are typically capped at a percentage of the coverage amounts listed in the policy (for example, five percent of the value of a primary structure, other structure, and personal property). You will not owe the local government any additional money, even if the actual costs to remove the debris exceeded the amount designated in your insurance policy for debris removal. The local government will only collect remaining insurance proceeds, if any, after you have removed all fire related debris.
- No Specified Amount: If your homeowner's insurance policy does not have a separate, debris-specific clause and instead includes the costs of debris removal in the total coverage, the local government will only

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collect insurance proceeds for debris removal after you have rebuilt your home. The local government will only collect any available insurance proceeds, if any, after the rebuild. If there are no remaining funds, the homeowner will not owe the local government any additional money for debris removal.

**22. If I participate in the Consolidated Debris Removal Program, will the local government have the right to take all my insurance proceeds?**

No. The local government will only seek reimbursement from the insurance carrier as stated above. The local government will not attempt to collect any insurance proceeds designated for rebuilding.

**23. Can I use my debris removal insurance policy to remove items that are ineligible for removal under the Consolidated Debris Removal program?**

Yes. If you have a specified amount for debris removal in your insurance policy, you may use your insurance proceeds to remove fire-related debris that is ineligible for removal under the program (e.g., swimming pools, patios, trees, etc.). The local government will only collect remaining insurance proceeds, if any, after you have removed ineligible fire-related debris.

If your homeowner's insurance policy does not have a separate, debris-specific clause and instead includes the costs of debris removal in the total coverage, you may use these proceeds to pay for the removal of fire-related debris that is ineligible for removal under the program. The local government will only collect remaining insurance proceeds, if any, after you have removed ineligible fire-related debris.

In either scenario, the property owner will be required to substantiate all expenditures.

## Contracting

### **24. Will the State's Debris Task Force use local contractors in this effort?**

The State's Debris Task Force will choose a prime contractor who will hire subcontractors. The State's Debris Task Force will make every effort to encourage the prime contractor to use local subcontractors.

If you have any questions regarding the Consolidated Debris Removal Program, send them to [debrisquestions@caloes.ca.gov](mailto:debrisquestions@caloes.ca.gov) or visit our website at [wildfirerecovery.org](http://wildfirerecovery.org).

### **25. Will the State's Consolidated Debris Removal Program remove trees from my property?**

Yes, the debris removal contractor will remove trees that are a threat to the safety of the debris removal crews while working on your property and trees that are dead or likely to die within five years as a result of the fire, as determined by a certified arborist, that present a threat to public health and safety on the public Right of Way (ROW), i.e. roadways, and/or public infrastructure, fire hydrants, water meters, etc.

### **26. I don't have any burned structures on my property, but I have burned trees, am I eligible for the State's Debris Removal Program?**

Yes. Whether or not you have a burned structure, if you believe you have trees on your property that are dead or likely to die within five years as a result of the fire, you should submit a Right of Entry Form to your county. The State will use a certified arborist to determine whether the trees on your property present a threat to the public Right of Way (ROW), i.e. roadways, and/or public infrastructure, fire hydrants, water meters, etc.