



# Debris Removal

## What is the Sonoma County Consolidated Fire Debris Removal Program?

The Sonoma County Consolidated Fire Debris Removal Program (Program) has two phases: removal of household hazardous waste and removal of other fire-related debris.

**Phase I:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently inspecting all fire-damaged properties and removing Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) that may pose a threat to human health, animals, and the environment such as batteries, propane tanks, and paints. Phase I is being conducted at no cost to property owners and is required for all residential properties. It consists of air monitoring for worker safety and visual observations to identify locations of HHW and other hazardous materials and containers. Once properties are surveyed, HHW collection teams will remove the materials identified during the survey. HHW includes leftover household products that can catch fire, react, or explode under certain circumstances, or that are corrosive or toxic. Products such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides can contain hazardous ingredients and require special handling and disposal.

**Phase II:** The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and local officials are coordinating with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to conduct fire-related debris removal. This will include removal of all burnt debris, including appliances, electronics, foundations, trees that are a safety risk to contractors, and some soil to ensure the site is clean and safe for building.

## Is participation in this Program mandatory?

Phase I of the Program is required for all residential properties. All properties are required to timely remove the hazardous debris fields. Phase II debris removal by USACE is optional, however, properties are required to timely remove the hazardous debris fields and deadlines will be set by the City and County. Removal by a private contractor is authorized, but will be done at the homeowner's expense and work done must meet or exceed the standards set by local, state, and federal agencies. This includes compliance with all legal requirements for handling, disposal at authorized disposal sites, soil sampling, and transportation. In addition, best management practices must be utilized along with work activity documentation, and erosion control. Phase I of the Program is being conducted at no cost to property owners.

## Will we need to be there, or can we be there, during this process?

Owners are not required to be present for either phase of this process. 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. Exclusion zones will be established surrounding the current work area to ensure safety of the public.

### **How will I know that the process has started and completed?**

Phase I is currently underway; EPA will post a sign on each property when the HHW removal is complete. EPA will also notify the broader community when it has completed HHW removal in an entire neighborhood. For Phase I, USACE employees will contact homeowners via phone 24-48 hours in advance to provide notice of work start times. The USACE contractor is required to provide USACE a formal report of completion. The USACE will provide those reports to the county and the county will notify homeowners.

### **Why not 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. Additionally, 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 landfills. Removal of hazardous waste from the fire debris prevents these environmental contaminants from polluting the environment, and protects workers and the public from exposure during debris removal efforts. The crews that conduct removal are specifically certified to handle household hazardous waste.

## **Phase II Consolidated Fire Debris Removal Program**

### **What is included in the USACE Phase II Debris Removal?**

Phase II will include debris and ash removal related to any structures on residential properties that are at least 120 square feet. Driveways will be retained as much as possible both for possible reuse and also to serve as a staging area for debris removal and rebuilding equipment.

### **How much will Phase II cost?**

If you had insurance in effect at the time of the wildfire that provides coverage for debris removal, it is required that those funds, not used for rebuilding, go toward reimbursement of Program costs. In most cases the cost of debris removal will be greater than the insurance available. Reimbursement amount will not exceed the costs of debris removal on your specific property. If coverage for debris removal is not a separate insurance category, any reimbursement for debris removal will be limited to the unused benefit amount (if any) in that coverage category after the residence is rebuilt. If the full amount of general coverage is used for rebuilding, you will not be responsible for any reimbursement. If you participate in Phase II of the program, we recommend that you consult with your insurance carrier to confirm how much is dedicated to debris removal. If your site will require private debris removal in addition to what is covered under the USACE Phase II, you can use your debris insurance proceeds to cover those costs, and will only be expected to assign the remainder (if any) to reimburse the Program. If you do not have insurance the Program will be provided at no cost.

### **How do I sign up for Phase II of the Debris Removal Program?**

Property owners sign up by completing a Right-of-Entry Permit (ROE) form, and providing insurance information if applicable. The ROE and insurance documents must be submitted to the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services - Environmental Health in person or by mail at 625 5th Street, Santa Rosa CA 95404, by email to [ehroe@sonoma-county.org](mailto:ehroe@sonoma-county.org), or by fax at (707) 565-6525. The ROE form can be obtained by going to:

[www.sonomacountyrecovers.org/debris-removal/](http://www.sonomacountyrecovers.org/debris-removal/) or visiting the ROE Processing Center located at 625 5th Street, Santa Rosa CA 95404. The ROE Processing Center can be reached by phone at 707-565-6700.

### **How long do I have to sign up?**

The deadline to sign up is November 13, 2017.

### **Can I make changes to the ROE form?**

No, the wording in the ROE form is required by California and Federal law and therefore, the terms cannot be changed. We understand that there are many questions related to this form, and answers have been provided in this document for clarification purposes.

### **The ROE includes an indemnification and hold harmless provision. What does this mean?**

State and federal laws require that you agree not to sue the county, state, or federal government for harm resulting from the debris removal.

### **Can I be sued by the state or federal contractor that is cleaning my property?**

No. All contractors will be licensed and insured, and their insurance will cover any injuries or damage to equipment that occurs during the debris removal process.

### **What happens if a contractor damages my property during Phase II?**

Any pre-existing improvements on the property, such as fences, gates, etc. which are damaged or temporarily removed in the debris removal process will be repaired and/or replaced by the contractor.

### **How do I let the USACE know about sensitive items on my property?**

Homeowners should include on their ROEs any information they may have regarding location of wells, septic systems, ponds, pools, leach fields, water lines, or other structures on your property to assist the contractor with their obligation to identify existing infrastructure on the site. These items can be indicated on the blank last page of the ROE, or by attaching plans, drawings, etc.

### **Will debris removal program take vehicles?**

During Phase II, vehicles that are in the driveway or garage will be marked with property address will be removed and sent to a staging area insurance inspection.

If the property owner, or their insurance company, needs to remove a vehicle they can do so after Phase I has been completed on their property. Extreme caution should be taken, not disturb the ash footprint. Vehicles must be disposed of in accordance with state and local requirements (e.g. county abatement process and at an appropriate landfill). This will not jeopardize a property owner's ability to participate in the Phase II Debris Removal Program.

Law enforcement is working with vehicle owners to make arrangements to remove their fire-damaged vehicles from public streets to make way for debris clean-up equipment and operations. Owners should make arrangements to tow their vehicles off of public streets at this time. Fire-damaged vehicles that remain on public streets will be towed.

### **Will foundations be removed as part of the clean-up process?**

Yes, foundation removal will be included in Phase II of the Program. The decision to include foundation removal on all sites was based on prior damage assessments from similar disasters. Testing following previous fires has confirmed that most foundations were not structurally safe, and that contamination leached into the soil underneath foundations that cannot be addressed without foundation removal. Even if your foundation has been determined to be structurally sound, there is a risk of exposure to toxins if you choose not to remove it. If you want to keep your foundation, you are not eligible for Phase II of the Program, and you will be required to meet approved standards to ensure the structural integrity of your foundation.

### **Will piers be removed?**

Foundation piers will not be removed. The contractor will make every effort to minimize damage done to piers during stem wall and foundation removal.

### **Will retaining walls be removed in Phase II?**

Generally, retaining walls will not be removed.

### **Will pools be removed?**

Pools will generally not be removed under the Program. In rare circumstances, such as indoor pools, they will need to be removed as part of the residential clean up. USACE will clear the pool of debris, drain it, and fence off the pool area. USACE will not be drilling holes in pools.

### **On rural properties where the main home was not destroyed, will the Program remove destroyed outbuildings?**

Yes, any destroyed structures on a residential property that are at least 120 square feet can be included in Phase II.

### **What condition will my property be in after the debris removal?**

Sites will be left in an environmentally safe condition with erosion control measures in place ready for property owners to begin the rebuild process. Some grading may be necessary to meet building site specifications.

### **How deep below the surface will the cleanup occur? How much soil will be removed and will it be replaced?**

USACE generally expects to clear 3-6 inches of soil prior to re-testing. Additional soil may be removed if contamination is still present. The Program will not bring in additional soil.

**How do we determine property lines after debris removal?**

Professional land surveyors/engineers can be hired to get an accurate determination of where legal property lines are. Additional information may be included in your deed and in Assessor's maps.

**How will the neighborhood phases be scheduled?**

The overall project is scheduled to be completed by early 2018. Phasing of clean-up will be decided after the ROE form submittal deadline and will be based, in part, on concentration of participating properties.

**Does the Program cover smoke damage or damage to siding in otherwise intact structures?**

No. Phase II of the Program is for debris removal of destroyed structures on residential properties that are at least 120 square feet.

**Am I eligible for debris removal if my house didn't burn down, but it is covered in ash?**

No. Phase II of the Program is for debris removal of destroyed structures that are at least 120 square feet.

**What precautions will be taken to prevent toxic contaminants from affecting air quality of surrounding neighborhoods during debris removal?**

Air quality monitoring is currently being conducted by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). Air monitoring related to environmental cleanup of fire-related disaster debris will be conducted by USACE. More information is available at <https://monitoring.airfire.org>.

**Will trees be removed in Phase II of the program? How will you determine which trees are removed?**

Generally, in Phase II trees will not be removed. However, USACE will be removing any trees that either impede work or present a hazard to crews.

**If my house is undamaged, but in a burned neighborhood, can I live in my house during debris removal?**

Generally yes. Exclusion zones will be set up as a safety precaution but it is not anticipated that they will impact standing residences.

## Phase II Private Contractor Remediation Plan

### Can I opt out of Phase II and do my own debris removal work or hire my own contractor?

As an alternative to the federally assisted debris removal program, a homeowner can take on the costs of debris removal themselves and hire a properly licensed contractor. All work must be completed pursuant to requirements set by the city and the county. You may not do the work yourself unless you have the required certification/license. No state or federal funds will be available outside of the Program. It is recommended that you consult with your insurance company prior to any clean up activity. More information is available on [SonomaCountyRecovers.org](http://SonomaCountyRecovers.org)

### If I hire a private contractor to remove debris, what is the process to follow?

Private debris removal must follow the standards adopted by the City of Santa Rosa and the County of Sonoma, which mirror the state standards being used by the USACE for the Debris Removal Program. More information can be found at: [www.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Debris-Removal/](http://www.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Debris-Removal/)