



DEBRIS REMOVAL FAQ **Effective 10/28/2020**

DEBRIS REMOVAL PROGRAM

1. What is the process for debris removal?

The cleanup of fire damaged properties needs to occur in two phases:

- **Phase I:** Removal of household hazardous waste (HHW). The removal of HHW needs to happen first so that the ash, foundation, and soil that is removed in Phase II can be taken to a Class III landfill. Hazardous waste cannot be deposited in a Class III landfill.
- **Phase II:** Removal of fire-related structural ash and debris. Local and State government agencies are coordinating to provide assistance with this step. Property owners may also choose to hire a private contractor to conduct the debris removal. Before the property owner proceeds with this option, they must receive approval from the Tulare County Environmental Health Division (EHD).

2. What is considered household hazardous waste?

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

3. Are burned electronics and appliances 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.

4. How do I participate in the Phase I of household hazardous waste removal?

You do not need to do anything to have HHW removed from your property. Your property will be inspected and household hazardous waste will be removed from the burned area. There will be no charge to the property owner for this activity. Property owners should not attempt to remove or evaluate HHW. Contact with these materials can be toxic, result in long term health effects and/or cancer. For properties with locked gates, please contact EHD so that arrangements can be made to provide the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) with access to the property.

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

This is an emergency protective measure. 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. Hazardous waste could have significant long-term environmental impacts and therefore has unique disposal requirements. It must be separated from the debris waste before the general cleanup. Improper removal of HHW may impact your eligibility for cleanup or financial assistance that may be made available to you.



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

The HHW removal teams will leave a notice indicating that HHW has been removed. DTSC will also post an interactive map online showing their progress with Phase 1 HHW removal. Each burned structure is indicated on the map with a circle. The color of the circle will change when it has been cleared of HHW.

7. Once the household hazardous waste is removed, can property owners hire their own contractors to remove the remaining debris?

Tulare County has been approved for funding of 100% of the costs of removal of building ash and debris and emergency soil stabilization. The State agency in charge of ash and debris removal (i.e., "Phase II") will award contracts to conduct this work at no cost to the property owner. It is strongly advised that property owners wait for the State contractor perform these tasks.

The property owner can choose to use their own contractor. If a private contractor is used, the property owners are still required to remediate the property and remove the burn debris at their own expense in accordance with the County's Debris Removal Requirements. **The work must be completed by a qualified contractor in a manner that ensures the protection of public health and safety.** The property owners will not be reimbursed with public funds (if they become available) for removal of any debris. The order of actions needed to remove debris using a private contractor is:

- I. Property owner will hire a debris removal contractor.
- II. Property owner will submit a Debris Removal Application to EHD.
- III. The contractor will submit a Debris Removal Work Plan to EHD. The Debris Removal Work Plan will need to contain protocols for handling and disposal of debris, and ash, including any remaining HHW or asbestos, and the method for soils tested after cleanup is complete.
- IV. Once the application and plan are approved by EHD, the debris removal can proceed.
- V. Once complete, documentation from the solid waste facility where the debris was taken and the post-soil sampling results must be provided to EHD to confirm debris removal has been completed and contaminants from the burned structures have been removed.
- VI. EHD will issue a Debris Removal Clearance Letter once documentation confirms debris removal was conducted properly and according to the plan. Debris Removal Clearance from the Environmental Health Division will be required prior to rebuilding.

8. After debris is removed in Phase II, what are the next steps?

After all debris has been removed, soil testing must take place to confirm the contaminants have been removed. Erosion control measures may need to be implemented. Additional information about this step will be provided by Tulare County EHD.

9. How are rivers, streams and aquifers protected from contamination during this work?

Erosion control measures are to be used on the site. Silt collection devices are placed around storm drains to minimize impacts to rivers, streams, and aquifers. Measures such as wrapping the debris in trucks during debris removal operations is also used to minimize particles traveling from the air to the water.

10. Who will pay for the debris removal?

Phase I, HHW removal is paid for by the government using emergency relief funds for eligible properties. EHD will be providing more information about Phase II as soon as it is available.



HHSA
Public Health

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

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

Visiting your property will **not** jeopardize your claims for disaster assistance. To avoid jeopardizing your claim, **do not move ash and debris or modify the “ash footprint.”** Property owners who desire to search for possible salvageable items should do so with caution as many hazards are present. Please review the safety precautions on the “Returning Home after a Wildfire” handout and wear proper protective gear: eye protection, masks, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants. Minimize your contact with fire debris, which may contain materials that can be hazardous to your health.

For questions about household hazardous waste or debris removal, please contact the Environmental Health Division at (559) 624-7400.