Recovery Guide to Wildfire Debris Removal

Consolidated Debris Removal Program

Overview for Residential Property Owners

CalRecycle Cal OES DTSC

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After the Fire

Help is Available

California Office of Emergency Services
Find information about your fire incident:
Wildfirerecovery.caloes.ca.gov

Disaster Assistance Improvement Program
Find help for federally declared disasters
Disasterassistance.gov
(800) 621-3362 | TTY (800) 462-7585).

Local Government Services
Cities and counties often promote local services through local flyers, media, and social media.

Avoid Toxic Ash and Debris

Toxins in the debris of burned homes include:

- Arsenic
- Lead
- Mercury
- Asbestos
- Other hazards from burned propane tanks, batteries, and household chemicals

Caution!

Do not let your children near wildfire debris or ash!

Wear Protective Gear

- Respirator
- N-95 mask
- Gloves
- Long shirts and pants
- Shoe coverings
- Safety eyewear

Safely sifting through ash and debris without moving it **will not** disqualify you from no-cost government debris removal.

Moving or spreading debris outside of the structural footprint **will** disqualify your property from this program.

Debris Removal in 2 Phases

Wildfire debris must be safely removed to prevent more harm to you and your community.

Debris removal begins after a disaster is declared and Cal OES grants your county's request for assistance.

Phase 1: Removal of visible household hazardous waste happens right away

Phase 2: Removal of remaining ash and debris

Prepare to Enroll in Program

1. Identify a long-term mailing address
2. Gather insurance and property ownership documents

Don't forget!

1. **Touching or breathing ash and debris is dangerous.**
2. **Debris removal is a 2-phase process.**
3. **Find resources at wildfirerecovery.caloes.ca.gov.**

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DTSC Cal OES

Phase 1 Overview

Household Hazardous Waste Removal

To reduce toxic exposure of cleanup crews and the public, visible household hazardous waste and bulk asbestos are removed from burned properties by either:

- California's Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)
- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Properties Are Not Safe After Phase 1

Phase 1 only removes visible household hazardous waste.

Toxic materials like lead, mercury, arsenic, and asbestos remain under heavy debris and are mixed into ash and soil.

After DTSC completes its work, Phase 2 crews will conduct a full asbestos assessment and removal. If additional hazardous waste is discovered during Phase 2, DTSC crews will return to assist.

Crews follow strict health and safety protocols to protect themselves and your community from dangerous ash and debris.

Household Hazardous Waste

- Auto and household batteries
- Compressed gas cylinders, including propane
- Pesticides and other chemicals
- Paints and thinners
- Aerosol cans
- Asbestos siding, pipe insulation, and floor tiles
- E-waste, such as televisions and computer screens

Don't forget!

1. **Phase 1 happens automatically at no cost.**
2. **Phase 1 crews remove visible household hazardous waste and bulk asbestos.**
3. **Even after Phase 1 is complete, the property is still toxic.**

This sign posted on your property after Phase 1 doesn't mean the site is clear of toxic debris and ash.

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Phase 2 Overview

Debris Removal

Home Wildfire Debris is Toxic

Wildfire debris contains toxins like lead, mercury, arsenic, and asbestos.

After Phase 1 removes the most visible household hazardous waste, the rest of the toxic debris must be removed safely to protect your community's air, water, and land.

Step 1: Phase 2 Cleanup Options

Communicate directly with your county about which of these two options you select to do the required debris cleanup:

A. Enroll in the government-managed and funded program by submitting a Right-of-Entry form to your county

- State-managed cleanup has no out-of-pocket costs for property owners
- Rigorous protocols and testing prevent toxic debris from endangering your community's air, water, and land

B. Conduct the cleanup yourself or hire a private contractor by enrolling in the alternative private cleanup program

- Homeowners hire and manage a private contractor at their own expense to meet debris cleanup standards and safety protocols
- Homeowners obtain permits and environmental OK before contractors begin work
- Homeowners follow county permitting and environmental regulations before and during debris removal

Step 2: Site Assessment

Assessment teams inspect each property to create a safe plan to remove debris.

Step 3: Asbestos Assessment and Removal

Specialists test for and remove asbestos that wasn't removed during Phase 1.

Step 4: Structural Debris Removal

Government-managed crews clear ash, debris, and contaminated soil after giving property owners 24 to 48 hours notice.

Step 5: Soil Testing

Contractors test independent soil samples for contaminates like lead or mercury and remove soil that tests high.

Step 6: Hazard Tree Removal

Contractors identify and remove fire-damaged trees in danger of falling on public property.

Step 7: Erosion control

Crews place mulch where structures once stood to protect the soil and watershed from eroding away.

Step 8: Final walk-through

State supervisors inspect the property to verify that all work was completed satisfactorily.

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Phase 2 *Step* 1

Enrollment: Right of Entry

Debris Removal Options

To protect your community from dangerous contaminants, debris and ash from every structure destroyed by a wildfire must be cleared.

Property owners have two options:

A. Enroll in the government-managed and funded debris removal program by returning a signed Right-of-Entry form (ROE) to your county

B. Hire and manage a private contractor at your expense who follows state mandated:

- Work practices
- Standards
- Safe disposal practices and rules

Contact your city or county to get an ROE form or get rules for private cleanups.

About the ROE Form

Sign and submit an ROE form to:

- Enroll in the no out-of-pocket cost state clean-up program
- Grant state contractors permission to access your property to clean it

You must provide the following information:

- A copy of a government-issued ID
- Insurance documents (if insured)
- Signatures of all legal owners or trustees

You can include additional details or drawings of the property on your ROE form, such as:

- Property features to protect like wells, septic tanks, and leech fields
- Remains of outbuildings and other debris piles to clear
- Fire-damaged vehicles to remove—or leave

Priority is given to sites in or near vulnerable areas, such as watersheds, schools, daycare centers, and healthcare facilities.

You and your neighbors can speed up your cleanup if you return forms early.

About Your Insurance

You are not required to be insured to participate in Option A. However, if you do have coverage, your insurance company will be required to pay the debris removal portion of your policy. This will not impact coverage to rebuild your house or replace items.

Don't forget!

1. **You will primarily communicate with your county about the debris remove program. A Call Center will be established to support property owners.**
2. **Your ROE form enrolls you in the government debris removal program.**
3. **Owners pay no out-of-pocket cost for the government program.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 2

Site Assessment

To maximize program safety and efficiency, assessment teams, along with environmental and archaeological professionals, visit each property to identify and document conditions.

Elements of a Site Assessment

Assessment teams document the following elements on a residential property:

- Debris piles, including the primary structure and outbuildings
- Fire-damaged vehicles
- Wells and septic tanks that are visible or identified on the ROE
- Nearby streambeds and water sources
- Nesting birds and endangered species habitats
- Historical and cultural artifacts that should be protected during debris operations
- Safety hazards, such as standing chimneys, walls, or fire-damaged trees
- Safe property access

Site Assessment Schedules

Staff will contact you with any questions about your property and notify you 24 to 48 hours before debris removal begins so you can arrange to be present.

Due to the number of properties assessment teams visit each day, it's not possible to schedule specific appointments for owners to be on site. Give as much detail in your ROE to assist assessment teams on their site visits.

Don't forget!

1. **Your ROE is used to help with site assessment.**
2. **Site assessments help debris removal go faster.**
3. **Staff will contact you with any questions about your site.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 3

Asbestos Assessment and Removal

Asbestos is Prevalent in Homes Built Before 1985

Asbestos is a naturally occuring mineral prevalent in construction materials, and it is very toxic. For the safety of crew members and the community, asbestos must be removed by specialized subcontractors before any debris can be removed.

On previous wildfire cleanups, CalRecycle crews have discovered significant amounts of asbestos in the residential debris, including in stucco, roofing, floor tile, linoleum, fireplaces, furnaces, sheetrock and joint compound, cement pipe, exterior home siding, vent insulation, concrete and mortar, and other building materials in homes built before 1985. While not as common, asbestos has also been discovered in homes built after 1985.

Phase 1 Removed Visible Asbestos Only

Household hazardous waste removal in Phase 1 only removes asbestos that can be clearly and safely identified without using heavy equipment.

Asbestos may still be under heavy debris and mixed into the ash.

Asbestos Abatement and Removal

For about half of the properties in Phase 2, special crews:

1. Remove asbestos in safely sealed bags to keep it out of the air
2. Dispose of it at a special site

Asbestos in insulation is often white, layered, and has curly fibers.

Don't forget!

1. **Even if a home is new, it may still have asbestos.**
2. **Phase 1 doesn't clear all asbestos.**
3. **Asbestos is a danger to families, workers, and the community.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 4

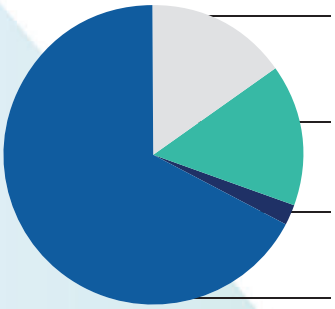
Structural Debris Removal

What to Expect

You will receive a phone call 24 to 48 hours before crews remove structural debris from the property.

To protect the public and community:

- Crews tape off the ash footprint, allowing only workers fully covered from head to toe to enter
- Crews divide debris into 4 categories and haul it to the correct disposal or recycling facility



Concrete
including the foundation

Contaminated Soil

Metal
including any vehicles

Ash and Debris

Project Timeline

A typical property can be cleared in two days if there are no property access issues, such as steep inclines.

Debris Removal Team and Equipment

A debris removal crew typically has:

- An excavator and operator
- A skid steer and operator
- Additional laborers
- A water tank trailer
- An independent monitor who records all work and ensures completion
- Several dump trucks to carry debris away
- Independent safety, environmental, and tribal monitors

Observing Debris Removal

You may be on your property during cleanup. You will not be allowed in the area marked by red caution tape.

You may ask crew leads about:

- The property
- If they have questions about the Right-of-Entry form
- If they can look for valuables lost in the ash

Don't forget!

1. **You will receive a call 24 to 48 hours before debris is removed.**
2. **You may be at the site during debris removal.**
3. **You may provide details about the property and any valuables that crews should be aware of.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 5

Soil Testing and Contaminated Soil Removal

Fire Debris is Toxic

After a fire, toxins like arsenic, lead, mercury, and chlorine seep into the soil.

The standard structural debris clean up removes

- Concrete foundations
- Top layer of soil

Soil is Cleaned to Safe Levels

Toxic materials like arsenic and mercury naturally occur in the environment at safe levels.

Before debris removal, environmental scientists identify natural levels of toxins in non-burned areas of the community to set cleanup goals.

Soil Testing Procedures

Independent environmental scientists:

1. Create a grid of flags
2. Send samples from each section to independent labs

If a section tests high, scientists remove and test 3 to 6 more inches of soil.

Crews level the property after all sections of the grid test below targeted soil levels.

Safety and Integrity

The soil testing process has two goals:

- Leave a property safe for families, children, and pets
- Protect ground water, wildlife, and air quality

To ensure integrity, environmental scientists, laboratories, and crews work independently under separate contracts.

Also, the cost of soil removal is paid per site, not per ton, to eliminate any incentive to remove extra soil.

Don't forget!

1. **Wildfires damage foundations and contaminate soil.**
2. **Independent labs examine soil samples.**
3. **Contractors have no financial advantage to remove extra soil.**

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Phase 2 Step 6

Assess and Remove Hazard Trees

Removing Damaged Trees Helps Communities Rebuild

CalRecycle removes fire-damaged trees that:

- May fall on public infrastructure, including roadways and schools
- Endanger the safety of debris removal crews

Residential survivors are eligible for this government-funded program, even if they didn't have a fire-destroyed structure.

Tree Eligibility

Trees are eligible for removal if they:

- Are at least six inches in diameter when measured from chest high
- Are on a property that has submitted a Right-of-Entry Form
- Could fall on public property
- Have been assessed by a certified arborist who has determined the tree is damaged and in danger of falling on the public

Assessing and Removing Trees

To remove the incentive to cut healthy trees, arborists and foresters who determine the health of the trees are separate contractors from the professionals who cut the trees.

Arborists

- Certified at highest level
- Work independently of tree cutters
- Not compensated per tree

Licensed Timber Operators

- Work under debris removal contract
- Overseen by state staff
- Liable for cutting any ineligible trees

Felled Trees Become New Products

Licensed timber operators take hazard trees to the correct end-use facility. Trees may be made into:

- Lumber
- Wood chips
- Mulch
- Bioenergy

Don't forget!

1. **Not all trees are eligible to be removed.**
2. **Independent arborists make the determination on tree health.**
3. **All cut trees will be removed from the property.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 7

Erosion Control

Preventing Floods and Waterway Contamination

After contaminated soil is removed, areas that contained ash are covered with "hydromulch," a wood-based mulch that will not sprout.

Other erosion control methods include:

- Compost socks filled with seedless organic material that keep sediment from running into streams
- Fiber roll barriers, seed free tubes used for perimeter protection

Fire-damaged retaining walls may be left in place if removing the wall will cause more erosion damage than removing it.

Removing Erosion Control

Once owners have properties returned, you can keep, move, or discard erosion control measures.

Get guidance from your local environmental health department.

Don't forget!

1. **Erosion control protects the property and nearby water systems.**
2. **All erosion control is seedless.**
3. **Erosion control measures will be left behind.**

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Phase 2 *Step* 8

Final Walk-through and Sign Off

State Supervisors Inspect Cleared Properties

Supervisors review site documentation as they examine the property, checking for:

- Complete removal of structural debris and marked hazard trees
- Contractor equipment left behind
- Needed environmental protections, including erosion control

Contractors Are Paid After State Inspection

To ensure work is completed and meets state environmental health and safety standards, contractors are not paid until each property has been inspected by a state program supervisor and determined to meet all program requirements.

Certification to County

After a state supervisor has approved final inspection of the property, CalRecycle will submit documentation to the county for review. The county will inform you by letter that the debris removal process is complete.

The county may also inform you of next steps to rebuild, including how to submit plans or file a building permit.

Don't forget!

1. **State program supervisors conduct final property inspection.**
2. **Contractors are not paid until the property passes state inspection.**
3. **The county will inform property owners that their property is complete.**

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Environmental and Historic Preservation

Before, During, and After

The safe, efficient cleanup of your property includes protecting your community's air, water, land, and historic resources. Staff are trained about:

- Risks to waterways and endangered species.
- Potential historical and cultural artifacts.

An Environmental Protection Plan is created to train staff and guide the entire debris removal process.

Air and Water

To safeguard the air and water for community members and wildlife, crews:

- Protect waterways from contaminated ash and debris.
- Monitor air quality around the community.
- Test soil for toxins on cleared properties.
- Remove asbestos.
- Spray debris sites with water to prevent airborne dust.
- Transport debris in lined and covered trucks.

Tribal Monitoring

California respects the sovereignty of indigenous people and treats tribal cultural resources with dignity.

Tribal representatives monitor ground-disturbing activities on each site to identify potential cultural resources and artifacts.

Debris removal pauses for tribe members to confidentially identify, catalog, and discreetly return cultural items to the ground. Artifacts are not removed from properties where they are found.

Endangered Species

The Department of Fish and Wildlife and other experts help identify endangered and protected species, such as nesting birds.

Work may pause briefly to ensure no species are at risk.

Don't forget!

1. **Work may stop briefly, but crews prioritize cleaning your property.**
2. **Even if crews find endangered species or tribal artifacts, they will clear your property and return it to you.**
3. **Debris removal protects you and your community's air, water, and land.**

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