

# Community Safety for Disaster Debris Recovery



## Disaster Debris Recovery Operations

To protect public health and the environment after an emergency disaster declaration, harmful debris must be safely removed and managed.



**Household  
Hazardous Waste**



**Breathing  
Hazards**



**Toxic  
Remnants**



**Operational  
Hazards**

## Personal Safety Reminder

Disaster debris contains toxins with immediate and long-term health risks. Anyone in contact with debris:

- **Must** wear personal protective equipment from head to toe and
- Change once outside the debris to avoid contaminating vehicles or other areas.

Cleanup workers have prolonged exposure to these hazards and must wear enhanced PPE that includes:

- Respirator masks
- Protective suits/footwear
- Safety Eyewear
- Gloves

Red and yellow safety tape is placed around cleanup sites to show where workers must wear enhanced PPE.

**Check with your local government on when you can return to your property after a disaster.**

## Operational Safety Protocols



### Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)

To reduce toxic exposure, visible household hazardous waste and bulk asbestos are removed prior to debris removal operations.

- Common HHW includes batteries, compressed gas cylinders, pesticides, paint aerosol cans, asbestos (common in siding, pipe insulation, and floor tiles), and e-waste.
- Visible HHW is removed immediately by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control or another agency.
- Toxins like lead, mercury, arsenic, and asbestos remain under heavy debris and mixed into ash and soil.
- Tanks and cylinders that have been emptied will be marked with a white "X". Unmarked tanks should be left alone.

### ► Safety Tip

Following the initial HHW sweep, a "completed" sign will be posted on each property, but it *does not mean* the site is clear of hazardous material. Until a site has been certified by the county, assume that dangerous chemicals are present.





## Breathing Hazards

Smoke and tiny particles of dirt, ash, heavy metals, asbestos, and other toxins from disaster debris can easily be inhaled.

- **Air monitoring** sensors throughout the community detect elevated particulates.
- **Street sweeping** clears roadways of dirt, dust, and ash that can affect air and water.
- **Site watering** before and during the debris removal process prevents contaminants from becoming airborne.

### ► Safety Tip

If you have a history of respiratory problems, avoid ash and debris and wear an N95 mask when outdoors.



## Toxic Disaster Remnants

Crews must safely remove disaster debris to prevent more harm to survivors, their communities, and the environment.

- **Soil sampling** prior to cleanup to measure naturally occurring toxins (i.e. arsenic and mercury) in non-disaster areas to set cleanup benchmarks.
- **Environmental assessments** of impact on watersheds and potential habitats with protection plans executed prior to debris removal.
- **Load coverage**, required for all trucks hauling debris. They must be tarped, and debris wrapped like a burrito, to keep contaminants from leaving the truck.



### ► Safety Tip

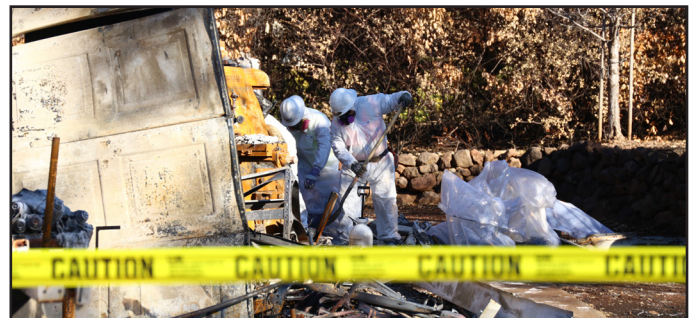
Do not enter any property with ash and debris without wearing protective clothing, including boots, eye protection, gloves, and an N95 mask.



## Operational Hazards

Safety protocols reduce risks that come with increased vehicle traffic, heavy equipment, and tripping hazards around disaster debris work zones.

- **Site access limits** start when cleanup work begins due to risk from heavy equipment, unstable structures and trees, crevices, and other hazards.
- **Traffic safety plans** establish truck routes from work sites to final destinations to minimize delays and community impacts.
- **GPS tracking** device requirements record truck routes and deliveries.
- **Truck inspections** ensure Department of Transportation safety standards for driver certifications, brakes, tires, and other vehicle safety.



### ► Safety Tips

Pay attention to signs and slow down around work sites. Larger vehicles are heavy and require more room to stop, have a limited field of vision, and wide blind spots.

Avoid entering the work zone. If you need to enter the work zone, wait outside until all equipment has stopped and a crew leader communicates verbally that you may enter.