



DEBRIS REMOVAL FAQ

Effective 9/29/2020

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 Environmental Health Services (EHS).

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 pool chemicals, car batteries, antifreeze, used oil filters, solvents, fertilizers, pesticides, propane tanks, disinfectants, aerosols, paint, bleach, and ammunition.

3. What if my destroyed property is not residential or I have large quantities of hazardous waste on my property that needs to be removed?

Contact EHS to discuss Phase 1 hazardous waste removal options. You may be eligible for a drop-off appointment with EHS' Household Hazardous Waste Program.

4. 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.

5. 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 EHS so that arrangements can be made to provide the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) with access to the property.

6. 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.

7. 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. US EPA 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.

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

A centralized debris removal contract has not been approved or arranged yet. Until a decision is made by the State, it is strongly advised that property owners standby. Once a property owner initiates cleanup of HHW or any ash or fire debris of any structures on the property, the property is automatically ineligible for any centralized or subsidized cleanup, or funding that may be available.

The property owner can choose to use their own contractor or, if available, a government debris removal program (which has not been confirmed as available). 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 EHS.
- III. The contractor will submit a Debris Removal Plan to EHS. The Debris Removal 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 EHS, 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 EHS to confirm debris removal has been completed and contaminants from the burned structures have been removed.
- VI. EHS will issue a Debris Removal Clearance once documentation confirms debris removal was conducted properly and according to the plan. Debris Removal Clearance from Environmental Health Services will be required prior to rebuilding.

9. 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 San Mateo county EHS.

10. 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.



11. Who will pay for the debris removal?

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

HEALTH AND SAFETY

12. 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 Environmental Health Services at (650) 372-6200 or envhealth@smcgov.org.