



**County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency  
Environmental Health**

701 Ocean Street, Room 312 ❖ Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
831-454-2022 ❖ Fax 831-454-3128  
<https://www.scceh.org/>

**Debris Removal FAQ- Dated September 25, 2020**

**1. What is the process for debris removal?**

The clean-up of fire damaged properties needs to occur in two phases: removal of household hazardous waste (Phase I) and removal of fire-related ash and debris (Phase II). The removal of the household hazardous waste 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.

The county has requested assistance with the debris removal from the state and federal government. On Thursday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, we were informed that they would assist us with Phase I. We have not received a response yet for assistance for Phase II.

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 Santa Cruz County Environmental Health.

This process is also explained and documents related to the debris removal are posted on the website at: <http://scceh.com/Home/CZULightningComplexFire.aspx>

**2. How can I be part of the debris cleanup that the state/federal government will conduct?**

**Phase I:**

The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and their contractors inspect for and remove household hazardous waste on all properties with structures which have burned. There will be no charge to the property owner for this activity.

Household hazardous waste is waste from houses that poses a threat to public health, animals, or the environment. Hazardous waste includes chemicals that are ignitable, toxic, corrosive, and reactive. Examples include pool chemicals, car batteries, cathode ray tubes from electronic equipment, antifreeze, used oil filters, solvents, fertilizers, pesticides, propane tanks, disinfectants, aerosols, paint, bleach, and ammunition. Property owners should not attempt to remove or evaluate household hazardous waste. Contact with these materials can be toxic, result in long term health effects and/ or cancer.

The USEPA will be staging the Phase I activities in the county starting the week of September 21<sup>st</sup>, and it is anticipated that the household hazardous waste removal activities will begin September 28<sup>th</sup>. The USEPA anticipates that it will take 6-8 weeks to complete this work.

**Phase II:**

When the county gets a response from the state/federal government about our request for fire-related ash and debris removal, we will share more information about the process and the timeline. To enroll in that program, the property owner will need to file a Right of Entry form with Santa Cruz County Environmental Health. We cannot start that process as we do not have a response for our request as of yet.

The Right of Entry form will be available at the website, when we have heard from the state/federal government.

**3. What is household hazardous waste (HHW)?**

HHW includes everyday products like paints, cleaners, solvents, oils, batteries, herbicides, and pesticides, which often contain hazardous ingredients. HHW field crews will remove items suspected of containing asbestos if it is easy to identify, but the property will not be cleared of asbestos until Phase 2. Pressurized fuel cylinders can also pose a threat and will be removed. Following a fire, these products require special handling and disposal, especially if their containers are compromised.



*Empty containers, marked with white paint, will be picked up during Phase II.*

**4. How is HHW removed from properties?**

EPA will survey each property, then HHW field crews will remove the materials identified during the survey. Some empty containers and tanks will be marked with white paint and left as debris for collection in Phase II of the debris removal process. For more information on Phase II, see Santa Cruz County's website at <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/FireRecovery.aspx>.



Once HHW is removed and Phase I is completed on your property, you may move to Phase II of debris removal once you obtain approval from the Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Division.

**5. Why is HHW removed?**

This work will clear the way for the removal of ash and debris, allowing the rebuilding process to begin. An Executive Order issued September 24 by the Governor of California provides EPA the authority to access properties to protect public health, animals and the environment from these threats.

Phase 1 is being conducted at no cost to property owners.

**6. Will EPA remove anything other than HHW?**

No. EPA will only remove hazardous waste. If firearms or suspected remains are found, EPA will immediately stop work and contact the County Sheriff. No other items will be removed.

**7. How will I know if my property will be surveyed for HHW?**

You can search for your address on the Phase 1 Status map: [Click Here](#).

If your property is on the map, it will be surveyed. If your property is not on the map, but you have fire-damaged or destroyed buildings (even small structures), call (415) 793-8794 and we will add your property to the list for being surveyed, assessed, and cleaned up

**8. May I provide input about potential hazards to EPA crews before they arrive at my property?**

Yes. Please call the hotline at (415) 793-8794 if you have any special comments or concerns about your property.

**9. How will I know when the process has started and been completed?**

EPA crews are in the field and will post a sign on each property when the HHW removal (or Phase 1) is complete. Completed properties are also indicated on the Phase 1 Status map : [Click Here](#).

**10. My neighbors' properties were completed for HHW but mine was not. Why not?**

There are several factors that impact the schedule of the EPA and DTSC field crews. For example, they may not work in an area when other field crews are present, to decrease traffic and congestion.

Weather and daylight also impact the schedule. Crews are moving between different zones. For more information on which zones the HHW field crews are working in today, [Click Here](#).

In addition, HHW field crews cannot work around dangerous trees or terrain, unstable structures, or other unsafe conditions. Those properties will be addressed during Phase 2.

This property's Household Hazardous Waste removal has been designated



**Ash & other materials  
remain a health hazard.**



*Please review health advisories before entering burned areas.*

For questions regarding the cleanup, contact the

**Right-of-Entry Center  
at 530-552-3155**

*EPA field crews will post this sign at properties where Phase 1 is complete.*

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

If property owners elect **not** to participate in the state/federal government debris removal program (if it is available), 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 in a manner that ensures the protection of public health and safety.

The property owners **will not be reimbursed** with public funds for the remediation of debris removal. The property owners may complete the remediation and debris removal using a qualified contractor. The order of actions needed to remove debris outside the state/federal government debris removal program is:

- 1) Property owner will hire a debris removal contractor or indicate they will do it themselves.
- 2) Property owner will submit a Debris Removal Application to Environmental Health.
- 3) The contractor will submit a Debris Removal Plan to Environmental Health. 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.
- 4) Once the application and plan are approved by Environmental Health, the debris removal can proceed.
- 5) Once complete, provide documentation from the solid waste facility where the debris was taken and the post-soil sampling result to Environmental Health.

- 6) EH will issue a Debris Removal Clearance if the documentation supports that debris removal was conducted properly and according to the plan.

**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?**

Safe sifting through your property will NOT jeopardize your claims for disaster assistance. Per the health officer order, do not disturb the ash making the cleanup harder or larger. We ask that you wait until the Household Hazardous waste removal has occurred, so it is safer for you to do so.

Property owners who desire to search debris for possible salvageable items should do so with caution, disturbing as little of the ash as possible, and with proper protective gear including eye protection, masks, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants. Residents should minimize contact with fire debris, which may contain materials that can be hazardous to your health. For more information visit:

<https://calepa.ca.gov/disaster/fire/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.html>

<http://scceh.com/Home/CZULightningComplexFire.aspx>

<https://oehha.ca.gov/media/downloads/public-information/report/fireash.pdf>

**13. Who will pay for the debris removal?**

Phase I is paid for by the state and federal government using emergency relief funds.

Phase II. If a state/federal government debris removal program is available, debris removal costs will be paid by state and federal agencies with no direct cost to owners. If property owners have insurance that specifically covers debris removal, or where there are additional insurance proceeds remaining after rebuilding, owners must inform local officials, and they may be required to remit a portion of the insurance proceeds to the County to avoid double benefits.

Phase II cleanup can also be conducted by a private contractor and then the cost is borne by the property owner.

**14. Can residents be present during the cleanup of their personal property?**

The safety of the public, workers and residents is a priority during debris removal operations. Work crews and heavy equipment will need continuous open access to efficiently complete their cleanup mission. Residents and the public are strongly encouraged to stay away from areas where debris removal operations are underway and in most cases exclusion zones will be established surrounding the active work area to ensure public safety.

**15. Are burned electronics and appliances (white goods) included in the household hazardous waste cleanup?**

Teams handling hazardous waste will not remove appliances or electronic wastes such as TV and computer monitors, computer processing units or cell phones. These materials will be removed as part of the Phase II ash and debris removal operation.

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

Removal crews are specifically certified to handle household hazardous waste. Household hazardous waste must be removed promptly by qualified operators to protect the public health and safety. Hazardous waste could have significant long-term environmental impacts. Removal

of hazardous waste from the fire debris prevents these potential contaminants from polluting the environment, and protects the workers and the public from exposure during debris removal operations. Also, if the hazardous waste is not removed, the ash debris cannot go to the non-hazardous landfill.

**17. Are soils testing a part of debris removal? Will they do erosion control?**

Yes, soil sampling and analysis after the excavation of the soil beneath the foundation is conducted as a part of the state/federal government debris removal program and is required as part of the private option.

Erosion control is conducted as a part of the state/federal government debris removal program and is required as part of the private option.

**18. Do the debris removal requirements apply only for houses that are completely destroyed? What about non-residential structures?**

Proper debris removal is required of:

- fire-damaged or destroyed houses
- all auxiliary structures larger than 120 square feet which were fire damaged or destroyed
- auxiliary structure less than 120 square feet that contained hazardous materials.

Auxiliary structures under 120 square feet which did not contain hazardous material are exempt from needing to be cleaned up. A property owner needs to complete a form indicating which structures are exempt from debris cleanup.

**19. Are property owners allowed to implement erosion control measures and debris flow mitigation strategies or conduct geotechnical investigations before Phase 2 is complete?**

- a. Yes, so long as the ash footprint is not disturbed, these activities can occur after Phase I.

**20. Who will be removing trees?**

- a. Trees that are a risk to debris removal crews will be removed during phase 2
- b. Trees on private property that will fall onto public right of way will be assessed and removed on a case by case basis during phase 2.
- c. Remaining trees on private property are the owner's responsibility. (Kristen and RCD suggest not removing trees as they help with erosion.)

**21. If I have homeowner's insurance, can I still participate in the debris removal program (Phase II)?**

Yes. However, to avoid a duplication of benefits provided by the state or federal government, you must disclose the existence of insurance that includes debris removal expenses.

**22. What portion of my homeowner's policy will the county collect for debris removal (Phase II)?**

It depends on the policy that you have. There are generally two types of debris removal coverages in a homeowner's insurance policy:

Specified Amount: One type of debris removal insurance coverage contains a separate, specific debris clause, typically capped at a percentage of the coverage amounts listed in the policy (for example, 5 percent of the value of a primary structure other structure, and personal property).

If you have this type of policy, the county will only collect the specified amount designated in the debris removal clause. You will not owe the county any additional money, even if the actual costs

to remove the debris exceed the amount designated in your insurance policy for debris removal.

No Specified Amount: Another type of debris removal insurance policy does not have a specified amount but includes the costs of debris removal in the total proceeds provided for the primary structure, other structure, or personal property.

If you have this type of policy, the county will only attempt to collect insurance proceeds for debris removal after you have rebuilt your home. The county will only collect any money that remains in your insurance policy, if any, after the rebuild. The homeowner will not owe the county any additional money for debris removal.