

Watershed Protection Program to Minimize Toxic Runoff from Structures Burned in the CZU Lightning Fire

Beginning November 21, the California Conservation Corps (CCC), will start installing much needed runoff control measures around burned structures and vehicles at no cost to property owners. The County of Santa Cruz is working with the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCD), the California Conservation Corps and the California Department of Water Resources to implement immediate actions that will reduce toxic runoff from burned sites, prior to implementation of the Phase 2 removal of debris and ash from destroyed structures and burned vehicles. The protection measures will limit the runoff of heavy metals and other toxic constituents that could adversely impact community drinking water supplies and aquatic habitat for endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead.

The RCD has visited over 400 properties in the burn area and provided recommendations to property owners on tree management, erosion control, and toxic runoff control containment. While natural process such as leaf litter and resprouting vegetation can offer good protection of the landscapes, protecting the immediate footprint of burned building and vehicles may need additional actions such as covering the area with tarps and/or weed free straw and installing compost socks and straw wattles. Some community groups and property owners have already installed the recommended measures, but many more still need assistance. Using data collected through the site visits and follow up surveys to properties owners a request was submitted to CalOES to assist with the installation. Activities will be performed at 350 to 400 of the highest priority properties located in water supply watersheds and in proximity to streams. This work is authorized under the County Health Officer's declaration of emergency and the urgent need to take steps to protect public health and safety.

Landowners do not have to opt in to receive this assistance, but they can choose to opt out. No actions will be needed on properties that are already carrying out their Phase 2 private clean up or that have already installed runoff control measures. To see a map of priority runoff control sites, go to <https://gis.santacruzcounty.us/mapgallery/Emergency%20Management/RunoffControlPrioritySites.pdf>

Properties outside of the region to be served by the Conservation Corps that want to install runoff control measures may be eligible to receive materials through the RCD. This support is made possible thanks to the Fire Response Fund at the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County For more information on that program, go to the RCD Website: <http://www.rcdsantacruz.org/post-fire>