

## **DEBRIS REMOVAL PHASES**

### **The LA County Wildfires debris removal program in January 2025 is a two-phase process:**

Phase 1: **The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** was tasked to conduct household hazardous material collection and disposal to protect public health and safety in impacted communities. These materials include but are not limited to paints, solvents, pesticides, batteries, propane tanks and bulk asbestos-containing materials.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is executing Phase 2 of the federally funded debris cleanup effort on behalf of FEMA. Our responsibility is to remove fire-related debris from private properties, including hazardous trees, ash and structural remains. On a property-by-property basis, this follows the EPA's initial hazardous materials removal.

### **What is Phase 2 of the debris cleanup?**

Objectives of our debris removal mission include:

- 1) Reducing immediate threats to public health and safety; and
- 2) Expediting economic recovery of the affected cities and communities.

These efforts involve removing ash, burned structural remains, hazardous materials, foundations, asbestos containing materials, vehicles, vessels and debris from private and public properties.

### **When does Phase 2 begin?**

The USACE Phase 2 mission began February 11 with the removal of debris at the first private property debris removal property. Residents had to opt into the USACE program in order to have their debris removed. The deadline for this program expired April 15.

## **RIGHT OF ENTRY PROCESS QUESTIONS**

### **What is a Right of Entry (ROE) form?**

A Right of Entry form gives government contractors permission to access your property and begin the private property debris removal clean-up process. This process includes removing all fire-damaged debris. These forms were coordinated between Los Angeles County and the Army Corps of Engineers. The deadline expired April 15.

### **What is the deadline to file a Right of Entry form?**

The deadline to “opt in” to the government-sponsored debris removal program was April 15.

### **What do I have to do to get the debris work done on my property?**

Sign a Right of Entry form giving the Army Corps of Engineers access to your property. Debris removal by the Army Corps of Engineers cannot proceed without an approved Right of Entry form.

**If I filled out the ROE form first, will my home be cleaned first?**

No, the debris removal process is not a first-come, first-served process. But getting your forms in early – and encouraging your neighbors to do so as well – will speed the work in your neighborhood.

**Why do I need to complete a Right of Entry form for debris removal?**

The government requires written consent from property owners to access their private property to perform the Phase 2 debris removal program. By submitting the form, homeowners are opting into the debris removal program and granting the government permission to access and enter onto their property to remove debris and ash from their property.

**Will debris removal by the Army Corps of Engineers be delayed if all residents in my neighborhood do not submit their Right of Entry forms at the same time?**

No. However, neighborhood captains can reach out and encourage other property owners in their neighborhood to sign up at the same time. It is more efficient for the Corps of Engineers to clear lots when there is a cluster of homes to clear.

**OPTING IN**

**What happens after I opt in to the USACE debris removal program?**

Once your right of entry is vetted through Los Angeles County and approved. It is then sent to USACE and submitted to our contractor to coordinate debris removal activities. You do not need insurance to participate in the program.

**If I opt in, can I opt back out even after I submitted my Right of Entry form?**

Yes, if you submit the Right of Entry form and then decide to opt out, you can do so.

**Does the opt in form require a wet signature of all the owners?**

You can complete the OPT IN form online at <https://recovery.lacounty.gov/debris-removal/>. Or, you may download and send the form in.

**I am filling out the Right of Entry form for someone else who is unable to do so. What information do I need to provide?**

If you are filling out the form for someone else, you must provide a signed and notarized document for the authorized agent. You will also need to provide your contact information on the form so the Army Corps of Engineers can get in touch with you if needed.

**After I turn in a Right of Entry form to the county, what happens next?**

First, the County will review your form and ensure it has been filled out correctly. Property records will be used to verify property ownership. Once the County validates the Right of Entry form, it will then be sent to USACE and assigned to our debris removal crews to work.

**OPTING OUT**

### **What happens if I opt out?**

If you opt out of the program, you must receive a permit to proceed with debris removal from the County and your city, and then you will be responsible for hiring the appropriately licensed and certified contractors. You will be responsible for all costs of debris removal and asbestos abatement.

### **What steps are required and what qualifications does a contractor need to handle the debris removal if I opt out?**

You are responsible for hiring the appropriately licensed and certified contractors to remove your debris. This will include retaining a Certified Asbestos Consultant to conduct a survey to identify whether there is asbestos within your debris. If the consultant finds asbestos, you will need to hire an abatement contractor; and the Certified Asbestos Consultant and abatement contractor will work together to submit an asbestos cleanup plan to South Coast AQMD for review and approval. More information on this process can be found [here](#).

Your contractors will need to be approved by the County and your city, and you will be responsible for all costs of debris removal. The work must be completed in compliance with all local rules and regulations related to debris removal.

Please check in regularly for additional information and updates on specific regulations at [recovery.lacounty.gov](http://recovery.lacounty.gov) or call the LA County Public Works Fire Debris Hotline at 844-347-3332.

## **OPTING OUT BY DEFAULT**

### **What happens if I do not complete any of the paperwork?**

Not submitting a Right of Entry form by April 15, is the same as “opting out” of the program. That is, if property owners do not complete the form by the deadline, they lose the opportunity for government-sponsored debris removal services. Homeowners will then have to conduct debris removal at their own expense.

LA County and participating cities will make attempts to contact the property owners prior to the deadline to inform them of options available. If necessary, the County and participating Cities may take steps to abate hazards not addressed by the property owner for the protection of public health and safety.

## **DEBRIS CLEANUP & REMOVAL**

### **How is the debris removal process conducted?**

Verified Right of Entry forms are grouped together and assigned to debris removal crews. Factors like property size, access, and the complexity of handling specific debris on site will determine how long each property takes to complete.

### **My house was destroyed in the fire. Can I go back onto my property to see if I can find any valuables or mementos?**

Yes. Sifting through your property wearing the appropriate protective gear will NOT jeopardize your claims for disaster assistance. Please do not remove non-salvageable debris

from your property to reduce the risk of spreading ash.

For more information visit:

- [cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR18-056.aspx](https://cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR18-056.aspx)
- [publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/docs/respiratory-protection-508-new.pdf](https://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/docs/respiratory-protection-508-new.pdf)

### **How long does the cleanup take?**

We are aiming for debris to be safely removed in two-to-three days per property. This timeline can change depending on the size of the lot or parcel, the amount of debris, inclement weather, and other factors, so it may take longer to remove debris. Other factors include the size of the lot, the amount of hardscape, the degree of damage, the condition of the foundation and whether you want to remove or try to maintain the foundation. None of those specifics will be available to the Army Corps of Engineers until they get on site.

### **Where will the debris be taken once removed from my property?**

An estimated 4.5 million tons of debris must be removed from the Eaton and Palisades fires. To provide some context, the 2023 Maui fires had approximately 400,000 tons of debris.

There are currently 17 authorized landfills or recycle centers accepting fire ash and debris for both the Palisades and Eaton fires. This represents approximately 40% of the LA County region’s annual waste disposal of approximately 11 million tons per year. See the county website for more information: <https://recovery.lacounty.gov/>.

Please note: Debris is being separated into metals, concrete, soil and ash. Recyclable materials, such as concrete and metal, are being recycled by area facilities. Other items are being disposed in approved waste landfills.

### **Can I be present during the cleanup of my personal property if I am participating in the Corps of Engineers debris removal program (Phase 2)?**

Your safety, as well as the safety of our contract workers, will be a priority during debris operations. While you may be present while we are conducting debris removal on your property, to reduce risks from safety hazards, we encourage you to stay outside the areas where debris removal operations are underway.

### **What is the “ash footprint” I keep hearing about on the news and why is it important? Will the Army Corps of Engineers contractors clear our entire lot or only the ash footprint?**

The “ash footprint” is defined as the area where debris from your structures settled after the fire. Contractors will determine the ash footprint during the site assessment. Items outside the ash footprint – including patios, landscaping, non-hazardous trees, extended driveways, etc. – will **NOT** be removed under the private property debris removal program; however, each property will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

There are always exceptions, for example, trees or other vegetation may need to be removed for the safety of debris removal crews or debris might have landed on the driveway, which would necessitate removal.

**What agencies are involved in the debris removal program?**

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works is coordinating the debris-removal process in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Phase 2 is managed by the Army Corps of Engineers under the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and in partnership with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

**CORPS OF ENGINEERS CONTRACTORS**

**Who is the contractor hired by the Army Corps of Engineers to complete the debris removal work and how will I know if they are legitimate?**

ECC is the prime contractor for debris removal but will be hiring local subcontractors to help with the process.

**How are the debris removal teams protecting our rivers, streams and aquifers from contamination?**

The debris removal teams will use erosion controls on the site as well as use silt collection devices around storm drains to minimize impacts to rivers, streams and aquifers. They are also taking measures such as wrapping the debris that is placed in trucks to minimize particles traveling from the air to the water.

**Who ensures compliance with worker safety regulations?**

Safety professionals and contractor safety staff ensure work complies with all OSHA, Cal/OSHA, CDC, and state and federal EPA standards.

**What safety and environmental regulations are contractors required to comply with?**

Contractors are required to comply with all local, state and federal laws and regulations regarding safety and the environment. Whenever there is a conflict between codes or regulations, the most stringent regulation is applied.

**SCHEDULING AND OPERATIONS**

**How does the Army Corps of Engineers decide which properties will be cleared and when?**

Contractors are responsible for planning their work, based on priorities set by Los Angeles County with input from city governments, to maximize efficiency.

**What is the expected timeline for debris to be removed from a property?**

The Army Corps of Engineers is aiming for debris to be safely removed in two or three days per property. This timeline can change depending on the size of the lot or parcel, the amount of debris, inclement weather and other factors, so it may take longer to remove debris.

**Who is supervising the debris removal contractors? How do we know the work is being done**

**properly?**

The Army Corps of Engineers has a robust Quality Assurance program. Our QA representatives and supervisors are in the field to provide direct oversight of government contractors, ensuring compliance with the contract terms and approved debris removal operations plan, and correcting safety issues.

**WHAT DEBRIS WILL BE REMOVED**

**What “debris” does the Army Corps of Engineers remove?**

Corps of Engineers contractors are responsible for removing:

- Chimneys
- Hazardous trees if they are dead or at risk of dying within five years
- Fire ash and debris
- Foundations (if specified in the right of entry form)
- Up to 6-inches of soil in the ash footprint
- Household hazardous materials not removed in Phase 1 by the EPA

**How will you decide which properties are cleared first?**

Properties cannot begin Phase 2 until they have received a Phase 1 clearance from the USEPA. The Army Corps of Engineers will batch properties together for clearing with the objective of moving as quickly as possible and addressing health and safety issues as a top priority.

**Will the Corps of Engineers demo my house?**

If the home is substantially damaged by the fire and requires demolition, FEMA will make the determination on eligibility. If the home is found to be eligible, Corps of Engineers will demo and remove the fire debris.

**What happens with hazardous trees?**

Hazardous trees are assessed by arborists and removed if they are dead or expected to die within five years. This is done to ensure safety and prevent future risks.

**Are driveways being removed as part of the program?**

Driveways are not eligible for the private property debris removal program and contractors will **not** remove them; however, there may be instances where portions of a driveway were in the ash footprint and must be removed.

**Are burned cars being removed as part of the program?**

Yes, burned cars on private property are being removed. USACE, FEMA and CalOES are working with the California DMV on this effort. In some cases, the car may be one of the last items removed during the final preparation phase.

**How will I know when Army Corps of Engineers will clean my property?**

The Army Corps of Engineers will contact you a few days before your property is scheduled for cleanup. The day before work begins, the Army Corps of Engineers will

reach out again to see if you are interested in observing the process from a safe distance.

**If my property was not destroyed, am I eligible for soil removal and other Phase 2 cleanup?**

Phase 2 cleanup is offered to eligible properties, as determined by FEMA. If a residence is standing and habitable, it likely will not be eligible. A destroyed structure of at least 120 square feet must be on the parcel to qualify for free debris removal by the Army Corps of Engineers. If you are unsure if you are eligible and wish to opt in to Phase 2, you are encouraged to complete the Right of Entry form.

**WHAT WON'T BE REMOVED?**

**What will the Army Corps of Engineers not remove?**

The Army Corps of Engineers contractors will NOT remove slope-stabilizing structural walls and other foundational elements if their removal could destabilize the property or neighboring areas.

**SAFETY**

**How does the Army Corps ensure safety during debris removal?**

The Army Corps of Engineers follows strict protocols for:

- Identifying hazardous trees and structures;
- Using appropriate equipment and trained personnel; and
- Complying with environmental safety standards to prevent harm to workers, residents and neighboring properties.

The Army Corps of Engineers follows strict procedures to ensure public safety during private property debris removal. When removing fire ash and debris, the material is placed in the bed of a dump truck inside a heavy-duty plastic liner. This liner is tightly wrapped around the ash, and a tarp is then lowered over the truck to ensure the ash remains contained during transit. You will hear the Army Corps of Engineers teams call this process “burrito wrapping” because of the way the plastic is folded over itself to contain the debris.

The Army Corps of Engineers also utilizes the "wet method" for debris removal, which involves applying water and mist to keep ash on the ground and prevent it from becoming airborne. This approach helps mitigate risks to the community, particularly for standing homes that have been reoccupied.

## **COSTS & INSURANCE**

### **What if I don't have insurance?**

If you don't have insurance, you can opt in to the Army Corps of Engineers debris removal program at no cost to you. If you opt out, you will be responsible for the cost of clearing the debris from your property.

Debris removal by the Army Corps of Engineers has no cost to you regardless of your insurance coverage or whether you have any insurance at all.

### **Do I need to get estimates from my own contractor and/or an insurance settlement before deciding?**

It is up to you whether to seek other advice about doing this work yourself, but we would strongly encourage everyone to take advantage of this free federal program to safely remove all debris from your property.

### **Can I get an estimate from the Army Corp of Engineers before I decide to opt in or opt out of the debris removal program?**

No. The USACE debris removal program comes without any additional out-of-pocket expense for the homeowner.

### **Will opting in to debris removal impact other benefits I am eligible for?**

There is NO IMPACT to your ability to receive benefits from other programs if you opt in to the debris removal program.

## **DO-IT-YOURSELF**

### **If I opt out and hire my own company to handle debris removal, can they start immediately?**

The start would come after Phase 1 is complete on your property and the permit has been granted.

## **VEHICLES**

### **My car was on the street and was burned. Where's my car?**

For vehicles left in the right-of-way following the fires: The California Highway Patrol removed vehicles that were left on the street and destroyed by the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire. To find your vehicle, contact the California Highway Patrol Dispatch at 323-259-3200.

### **My vehicle (boat, car, RV, motorcycle, trailer) is still on my property/in my garage and was burned. What will happen to my vehicle?**

Any "titled property" with a VIN (vehicle identification number) such as a motorcycle, car, RV, will be hauled to a staging area for adjudication by CHP. CHP will notify the rightful owner as identified through the VIN's registration and provide a "junk title" for the titled property.

## **FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE**



**What if I suspect fraud is being committed by a contractor?**

The Corps of Engineers takes fraud, waste and abuse complaints seriously. Any suspected fraud should be reported to the Corps of Engineers Office of the Inspector General <https://www.oig.ca.gov/connect/report-misconduct/>.

**Who can I call for more information?**

Property owners with questions about eligibility, operations or other concerns can contact the USACE Debris Removal Information Line at (213) 308-8305.

The line is staffed from 6 a.m. – 6:30 p.m., 7 days a week.