



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

Key Facts: Los Angeles Wildfires Recovery

Saturday, April 26, 2025

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Key Messages:

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is actively working in partnership with Los Angeles County, CalOES, FEMA and other partners to support the Southern California wildfire recovery efforts.
- Our number one priority is the safety and public health of the community as we work to remove ash and debris from the Palisades and Eaton fires. The mission is complex and includes methodical debris removal operations.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers brings unique capabilities to emergency responses and has a team from across the nation volunteering to support survivors as they recover.

Key Facts:

OPERATIONS UPDATE: PHASE 2 DEBRIS REMOVAL (as of April 25, 2025)

- USACE has more than 450 personnel on site and over 3,000 contractors actively supporting our local, state and FEMA partners to support survivors impacted by the Palisades and Eaton fires Jan. 7, 2025. This includes engineers, debris removal crews, arborists, safety officers, quality assurance specialists and more from across the nation.
- As of April 24, we've received 9,262 rights of entry applications from the county and cleared debris at more than 4,963 properties (1,992 at Palisades 2,971 at Eaton) and have completed and returned 2,834 rights of entry back to the county (1392 at Palisades; 1,442 at Eaton).
- We currently have more than 700 crews working 12-hour days, seven days a week for the express purpose of removing debris to mitigate risk to public health, protecting the environment and speeding community recovery.
- We are working faster than originally anticipated, but there are many variables that will determine when we are done. Our current estimate is still January 2026.
- We started our debris removal efforts, known as Phase 2, for eligible residential properties for the Palisades and Eaton fires under our private property debris removal program Feb. 11, 2025.
- USACE received a request from FEMA to remove an estimated ~4.5 million tons of ash and debris Jan. 17, 2025.
- We started our first debris removal project Feb. 1, 2025, at Pasadena Unified. This was 3.5 weeks after the fire.
- USACE is still receiving requests for public and private non-profit debris removal request until May 8, 2025.
- The right of entry deadline expired April 15 for private Property debris removal.

USACE FIRE ASH & DEBRIS REMOVAL (PROCESS):

- The Army Corps of Engineers is leading the Phase 2 debris removal program for the Los Angeles wildfires, in coordination with local, state and federal partners.
- Phase 2 is a systematic process designed to ensure hazardous debris is removed in a way that protects public health and the environment and supports recovery efforts.
- Our cadre includes experts in large-scale disaster debris removal to ensure this process meets the highest standards of safety and environmental responsibility.
- Our work is guided by best practices developed from previous wildfire recovery missions.
- The Corps of Engineers' role in debris removal does not include land use planning or rebuilding efforts, but we coordinate closely with state and county officials to support their long-term recovery and rebuilding plans.
- The timeline for Phase 2 of the debris removal program is expected to be complete by January 2026, but we are working as fast as we can to expedite that timeline and to help the community begin the rebuilding process.
- In some instances, the U.S. EPA may be unable to remove the hazardous material from properties due to unsafe conditions. These properties are “deferred” to USACE and may require initial site stabilization to make the property safe for crews to initiate debris removal.
- The county reviews and validates submitted rights of entry and then transfers eligible properties to USACE for Phase 2 debris removal. The county is also responsible for determining if standing structures are approved for removal.
- FEMA will consult with appropriate agencies for environmental and historic preservation prior to USACE debris removal.
- Debris is separated into numerous material types. Recyclable materials such as metals, concrete and vegetation such as trees and shrubs will go to recycling facilities. Ash will be sent to locally approved municipal solid waste landfills.
- All debris is sorted on-site, and each type of debris goes to landfills that are permitted to take that type of waste/debris.
- A property owner may coordinate with a USACE contractor to be present at the site where debris removal operations are taking place but will be advised to maintain a safe distance while the work is underway.

DEFERRED PROPERTIES:

- If a property is marked “Phase 1 Deferred,” it means there is a safety hazard on the site such as a standing wall or fire-damaged tree that could collapse or fall. USACE will not allow our workers to enter that site until the safety hazard is removed.
- Once the site is made safe, we will proceed with Phase 1 assessment, removing hazardous materials and bulk asbestos materials. When we have cleared the environmental or hazardous material, we will remove any deferred signs, and the

property owner will be allowed re-entry to their property prior to Phase 2 debris removal.

- **Pools and Ponds on Properties**

- **What will be done:**

- Pools within the structural ash footprint with eligible structural debris will have structural debris removed and may have water removed from the pool on a case-by-case basis.
- Pools will be fenced off after debris removal to prevent accidental falls.

- **What will NOT be done:**

- Pools will not be refilled.
- Pools will not be removed.
- Pools and ponds outside of the structural ash footprint will not be cleared or cleaned.

TEMPORARY DEBRIS REDUCTION, RECYCLING AND STAGING AREA

- We currently have three temporary debris reduction, recycling and staging area. Two in Palisades (Temescal Canyon and Will Rodgers), and one within the Eaton area at the Altadena Golf Course.
- The temporary debris recycling and staging areas are used to process, sort and reduce clean debris from fire-impacted properties. Doing so cuts down on trucking operations and speeds recovery efforts.
- Materials are brought to these staging areas after being washed. The cleaned metals and concrete are recycled and will re-enter the supply chain for future uses. Trees and shrubs are reduced in size and then transported to a landfill. This reduces the number of trucks on the road, reduces the volume at local landfills and speeds recovery.
- The sites have been approved by the local enforcement agency and CalRecycle for the proposed activities.

SOIL TESTING:

- FEMA requested USACE to remove debris under a program referred to as Private Property Debris Removal, or PPDR, for the Eaton and Palisades fire areas.
 - The request is for eligible property owners who opt into the federal program.
 - This includes removing wildfire debris and 6 inches of soil below the ash footprint.
- Anything beyond the 6-inch depth considered “over excavation,” and FEMA has determined those soils are unrelated to the wildfires, time consuming, costly and slows economic recovery.

- State and local laws do not require soil testing to meet certain requirements prior to rebuilding. Testing and over excavation are unnecessary for emergency public health and safety or for economic recovery.
- FEMA has not participated in funding soil testing on properties impacted by fires over the past 7 years of California wildfire events.
- Testing is inconclusive as there is no baseline to understand what was in the soil pre-fire:
 - California has naturally occurring asbestos within soils.
 - Previous mining operations also deposited chemicals in the soils.
 - Contamination beneath the first 3-6 inches is likely to have occurred independently of the fire itself.
 - Concentrations found below this depth are unlikely to pose immediate threats to public health and safety.
- FEMA has determined that removing 3-6 inches of soil beneath fire debris removes fire related contamination that could pose a threat to public health and safety. Best management practices further include wet debris removal methods and plastic wrapping debris in trucks during transport to manage dust.
- Los Angeles County and other local governments can conduct testing if they wish to do so but it is not linked to any requirement.
- Any additional questions regarding FEMA rationale for not testing should be referred to FEMA for a response.

LANDFILLS:

- 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.
- USACE and the Los Angeles County Public Works worked together to identify facilities across the Southern California Region that are **designed and permitted** by the state of California and other regulatory agencies to take fire debris and various material types such as concrete, metal, ash, soil and asbestos.
- Of the identified disposal facilities capable of handling ash and soil, four are located in Los Angeles County: Lancaster Landfill, Sunshine Canyon Landfill, Calabasas Landfill and Palmdale Landfill. Additionally, Azusa Landfill, also within the county, is the only facility permitted to handle asbestos.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers debris removal process first begins with removing and sealing asbestos and then sorting materials on-site into metals, concrete, ash before sending them to appropriate facilities.

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is separating materials on-site into metals, concrete, ash and asbestos and then sending them to appropriate facilities:
 - Metal and concrete are sent for recycling.
 - Ash and asbestos will be directed to landfills specifically permitted to manage those materials.
 - USACE is using several disposal and recycling options due to the volume of debris caused by the fires.

REMOVING/PACKING/HAULING DEBRIS:

- Our crews carefully remove fire debris, including structural remains, ash, and hazardous materials once the property is cleared of hazardous materials.
- Materials are sorted and prepared for transport following strict environmental protocols. Household hazardous waste is separated before we begin general debris removal to ensure it does not mix with other materials. All debris is sorted onsite, and the debris goes to landfills that are permitted to take that type of debris.
- Corps of Engineers contractors transport secured material directly from properties to landfills permitted by CalRecycle to accept that type of debris.
- The Army Corps of Engineers follows strict procedures to ensure public safety during the debris removal process. 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, after which a tarp is then lowered over the truck to ensure the ash remains contained during transit.
- Our contractors are utilizing 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 homeowners that were not impacted by the fires.
- Once we receive an approved right of entry, we will coordinate with the homeowner(s) during a premeeting a few days prior to debris removal and during the final notification call shortly before work begins.

HAUL ROUTES:

- Safety and community impacts are our top priorities, and we are actively working with traffic engineers, our partners and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, to identify if there are alternate routes that minimize impacts while maintaining efficiencies and doing so safely.
- USACE-contracted trucks are required to obey all local laws and regulations.
- If you notice a USACE-contracted truck violating traffic laws, please contact local law enforcement when it is safe to do so. You can also call the USACE Debris Call Center at 213-308-8305. You should note the truck’s license plate number, specific violation, the time and location of the incident and any other relevant details. USACE will investigate the matter and take necessary action to address the situation.
- USACE does not dictate haul routes for its contractors based on federal contractual requirements. We do, however, ensure that USACE-contracted trucks comply with all existing laws, rules and regulations.

- Trucking operations along Sunset Boulevard are a critical component of removing ash and debris in the fastest, safest way possible.
- The speed of our emergency recovery operations is solely dependent upon how fast we can get the ash and debris to a landfill. Because debris removal operations are dynamic, truck routes may shift daily to account for changing conditions, such as ongoing recovery work public safety considerations and road accessibility.
- There is approximately 4.5 million tons of ash and debris that need to be removed from the fires. We know this causes impacts to the community, but the removal is critical to help those that have lost everything to begin the rebuilding process.

TREE REMOVAL:

- **Balancing Safety, Recovery, and Preservation**

- Every decision about tree removal is made thoughtfully and with expert guidance from professional arborists.
- While we strive to preserve as many trees as possible, public safety and recovery progress must come first.
- We continue to work closely with homeowners, the county, and community groups to make informed, responsible decisions about tree removal and preservation.
- We understand that trees are an important part of the landscape and hold deep personal, cultural and environmental significance for many in the community. That's why our approach prioritizes saving as many trees as possible while ensuring public safety and the success of debris removal operations.

- **How We Determine Which Trees Must Be Removed**

- Trees are only removed if they meet one of the following criteria:
 - Within the Ash Footprint – Trees that have been burned or structurally compromised by fire.
 - Safety Hazard – Trees that pose an immediate danger to crews during debris removal. If a tree is at risk of falling or damaging equipment, it must be removed to protect workers.

- **Long-Term Viability**

- Every tree on a property that has submitted a Right of Entry is assessed by a registered professional forester. If the tree is unlikely to remain healthy and viable for at least five years, it may be marked for removal.

- **Criteria for Hazardous Tree Removal**

- A hazardous tree is defined as any tree that poses an immediate threat to life, public health and safety or improved property.
- A tree is eligible for removal under the program if it meets **all** the following criteria:
 - Has a diameter of 6 inches or greater (measured 4.5 feet above the ground).
 - Is located within 1.5 times the tree's height from a structure or presents a hazard to cleanup crews.
 - Is dead or expected to die within five years based on an assessment by an ISA-certified arborist with tree risk assessment qualification.

- Trees that have over 50% of their root ball exposed may also be deemed hazardous and subject to removal.
- **Preserving Trees Whenever Possible**
 - Homeowner Requests: If a homeowner wishes to save a tree, we carefully evaluate whether it can be preserved safely without interfering with the recovery process.
- **Tree Waiver**
 - The [Waiver of Hazardous Tree Removal](#) form is available here and also available at recovery.lacounty.gov. Owners are encouraged to express their intent to waive tree removal during the premeeting a few days prior to debris removal or during the final notification call shortly before work begins.
 - Refusing hazardous tree removal may impact the ability to obtain a rebuild permit. Local permitting agencies determine rebuild requirements and a remaining hazardous tree could be a factor in their decision.
 - Property owners who opt to retain hazardous trees through the waiver assume responsibility for any future safety risks posed by the tree.
 - Signing the waiver releases Los Angeles County, the state of California, the federal government and all associated agencies from liability related to the presence of the tree.
 - In response to community concerns, USACE amended its waiver submission process.
 - Property owners may now submit the Waiver of Hazardous Tree Removal via email or to the contractor during the 360-degree walkthrough, which is the last step before debris removal operations begin. Discussion of the waiver is best done during the premeeting a few days prior to debris removal or during the final notification call shortly before work begins.
 - Completed forms must be emailed to **EatonCallCenter@ecc.net** for Altadena properties or **PalisadesCallCenter@ecc.net** for Palisades properties.
 - USACE contractors are making every effort to accept supporting information in a variety of formats—including photos, emails, and other documentation—to meet property owners' requests and properly record their decisions.
- **NOTE:** Property owners are welcome to hire their own arborists or engage their local jurisdictions for evaluation of trees on their parcel.
- USACE nor any of its contractors are available for independent consultation nor are they able to recommend or have any preferential endorsement of any other arborists.
- **Tree Markings**
 - To enhance transparency and improve the process, USACE has added two new color markings in addition to the existing blue dot, which signifies a tree that has been assessed and determined to be hazardous.
 - **Blue Dot** – Trees marked with a blue dot at the base and a barcode have been determined to be hazardous and are scheduled for removal.
 - **Yellow Dot with Yellow Ribbon** – Trees where a property owner has submitted a hazardous tree removal waiver will be marked with a yellow dot at the base and a yellow ribbon wrapped around the tree. The barcode

will be removed, and this update will be cataloged in the contractor's system to ensure the tree remains in place.

- **Brown Dot** – If a tree is reassessed and determined to be non-hazardous by a higher-level ISA-certified arborist, it will be marked with a brown dot over the existing blue dot. The barcode will be removed, and this update will be recorded in the contractor's tracking system, confirming the tree will not be removed.

AIR QUALITY & DUST CONTROL

- USACE and ECC are implementing **strict dust control** measures and **real-time air quality monitoring** to protect public health.
- Water trucks and misting systems suppress dust.
- Air monitors are used to track total dust including respirable particulates sized 2.5 and 10 microns.
- Perimeter monitoring stations ensure compliance with air quality standards.

NOISE REDUCTION

- We use a variety of best management practices to reduce noise. Depending on the situation, these practices can include noise-reducing mufflers, temporary noise barriers or acoustic shielding.

AIR MONITORING:

- USACE is dedicated to minimizing dust produced from debris removal operations. Our contractor is using the "wet" method to minimize the material from becoming airborne.
- USACE contractors have real-time perimeter air monitors adjacent to work locations. If there are exceedances of action levels, the contractor will stop work, assess and remediate the situation as necessary before restarting work.
- The air monitoring program is overseen by our contractor's certified industrial hygienist. Calibrated air sampling pumps are used to collect personal exposure samples for asbestos, metals and respirable dust/crystalline silica. We use the results of these tests throughout the debris removal process to assess the appropriate personal protective equipment, or PPE, that needs to be used by site workers.
- Contractors entering the "hot zone," or ash footprint, are required to be in Tyvek suits and half-face respirators since they are working directly in the debris zone and ash.
- **Altadena Golf Course**
 - We continue using the Altadena Golf Course as a temporary debris reduction and staging area to expedite recovery within the greater Altadena area. We are implementing best management practices to mitigate any risk to the community. These measures include consistently spraying water on the material while reducing it and spraying water around the site to suppress dust.
 - We are also working with our partners involved with air monitoring and evaluation to share our data. Our partners include the California Air Resources Board, South Coast Air Quality Management District and Los Angeles County Public Health Department. All the agencies have access to and have been reviewing

- data for debris removal activities and would be responsible for messaging to the public, specifically residents near the monitors that show potential impacts.
- AQMD and USEPA also have air monitors available specifically for public health evaluation of potential dust impacts from the destroyed structures and debris removal activities.
- The federal standards are based on a 24-hour average. USACE is only conducting activities for 12 hours, which results in our project limit of 70 ug/m³ for PM_{2.5} and 300 ug/m³ for PM₁₀. Note that the averages for both PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ as posted on the Public Health website are below 35 ug/m³ for PM_{2.5} and for PM₁₀. We use 35 ug/m³ onsite near the equipment as a trigger to modify engineering controls to ensure air quality is not significantly impacted by site operations.
- Real-time air quality data for the golf course can be found here: <https://eatontdsr.fielddatasolutions.com/>. For background, when our air quality measurements are higher than normal, it is often a direct reflection of the ambient air quality within the greater Los Angeles area and not due to our activities at the golf course. Here is a link through the Public Health website that has additional air quality monitors: <https://breathe.caltech.edu/phoenix/>.

PRIORITIZATION

- USACE is prioritizing properties near ecologically sensitive areas, reinhabited properties and critical infrastructure to ensure public safety, environmental protection and community recovery.
- Protecting watersheds, streams and protected habitats from contamination is a top priority.
- Prioritizing areas where residents are actively living ensures they have unobstructed access, reduced health hazards and minimized exposure to remaining debris.
- Clearing debris in neighborhood clusters rather than isolated locations improves efficiency and restores a sense of community.
- Removing debris around hospitals, schools, emergency response facilities and transportation corridors ensures continued access to essential services.
- When a property is submitted to our contractors, it moves through a series of required phases that include assessments, asbestos testing, and abatement, if necessary, followed by scheduling for debris removal, erosion control and final inspections. During this process, we are unable to prioritize a survivor's request to expedite a specific property.
- Our contractors are operating under strict efficiency protocols to manage thousands of properties across multiple impacted areas. Reordering work can disrupt operations, delay other properties and compromise the overall pace of recovery.

TIMELINE & PROGRESS

- We are committed to moving quickly, but we MUST prioritize safety, environmental protection and compliance with regulations.
- USACE is continuously assessing and refining the timeline based on conditions.

- The initial 18-month timeline was set before key details—such as when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would complete their mission or when the rights of entry process would be available.
- We are working faster than originally anticipated, but there are many variables that will determine when we are done. Our current estimate is still January 2026.
- To put that in perspective, 4.5 million tons of debris would be approximately 110,000 to 150,000 fully loaded dump trucks (assuming 30-40 tons per truck).
- It would also be roughly 700,000 to 900,000 adult elephants (assuming 5-6 tons per elephant).
- Each property is unique, and timelines may vary depending on site conditions, permitting requirements and other recovery operations.
- Factors such as weather conditions, geography, hazardous material disposal and logistical constraints may affect progress, but our teams remain focused on completing the debris removal mission as safely and efficiently as possible.

PHASE 2 MISINFORMATION

- The debris removal process follows a structured, step-by-step approach to ensure safety, environmental protection and regulatory compliance.
- The Corps of Engineers will **NOT** bill you or collect funds from property owners.

HOMEOWNERS' INSURANCE & DUPLICATION OF BENEFITS:

- The Corps of Engineers does not bill or collect funds from property owners. The Los Angeles County is responsible for collecting funds from property owners who proceed with the federally funded debris removal program AND have debris removal coverage through their homeowners' insurance. Property owners should work closely with their insurance providers to understand their coverage.
- If someone claiming to represent the Corps of Engineers comes to you requesting payment, report the interaction immediately to your city/county officials or local law enforcement.
- IF WE ABSOLUTELY MUST: There MIGHT be coverage for debris removal in a homeowners' insurance policy. We strongly encourage property owners to consult with their insurance adjuster to understand their coverage and ensure they do not receive a duplication of benefits. USACE does not collect funds from property owners, but any insurance funds designated for debris removal must be used for that purpose. (no double-dipping; CANNOT have USACE conduct debris removal AND keep homeowners' insurance funds that specifically pay for debris removal (of what USACE clears)
- Eligibility for Partially Damaged Properties: In most cases, partially damaged properties will **not** qualify for the debris removal program. The program is designed to clear properties where structures have been **destroyed** or are beyond repair due to fire damage.
- You do NOT need insurance to qualify for the Corps of Engineers Debris Removal Program. The program is **free** for property owners who are uninsured or have no debris removal coverage.
- Speed vs. Safety: Some may feel that debris removal should move faster, but this is a complex operation that requires careful execution to ensure safety, environmental protection, and compliance with all local, state, and federal regulations.
- Recycling & Waste Management: Whenever possible, materials from debris removal are sorted for recycling to reduce landfill impact and support sustainable recovery efforts.

- This is why debris is sorted on-site at each property and not “scooped up” and moved all together to a landfill.

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY:

- Every decision in this mission is guided by the safety of the community, our workers and the environment.
- Debris from wildfires contains potentially hazardous materials and requires a structured and controlled removal process.
- It is critical for public health and safety to remove the hazardous waste from its current state, which is in an uncontrolled environment, to a controlled one, so we can minimize negative impacts to the community and environment.
- Continuous monitoring and safety measures are in place to prevent workers from exposure to harmful materials.
- Safety is our top priority. Fire-damaged debris may contain hazardous materials such as asbestos, heavy metals and other contaminants.
- During debris removal operations, debris and ash is kept wet to mitigate potential migration of ash and dust.
- All debris is sorted on each property to mitigate potential spread of ash and debris to the surrounding community.
- Each site undergoes meticulous debris removal, including the removal of up to six inches of topsoil within the ash footprint to address contamination concerns.
 - NOTE: The Corps of Engineers will **NOT** replace this soil.
- Air monitoring and dust control measures are in place to minimize the spread of debris particles and ensure a safe working environment.
- A specialized team of trained contractors ensure hazardous materials are handled and disposed of properly.
- We will provide regular debris removal progress updates through our wildfires webpage, located on the Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District website, as well as on the Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, social media platforms (specifically on Facebook/Meta).

PHASE 1, EPA REMOVAL:

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency started their mission January 16. They completed their mission Feb. 26. Any homes that were deferred to the USACE portion of the debris mission are being prioritized to expedite the recovery.
- Removing these materials is critical for public health and safety before the next phase of debris removal can begin.
- Many common household items become hazardous after a fire. These include:
 - Household chemicals such as paints, cleaning supplies, and automotive oils;
 - Garden products like herbicides and pesticides;
 - Batteries, including standard and rechargeable types;

- Propane tanks and other pressurized fuel containers; and
- Fire-damaged lithium-ion batteries, which require special handling due to safety risks.
- Temporary storage locations have been secured to safely stage and process hazardous materials from each fire area.

ADVANCED CONTRACTING INITIATIVE

- The U.S Army Corps of Engineers awarded an advanced contracting initiative to ECC Jan. 9, 2023, as a firm fixed price contract after three years of source selection-tradeoff evaluation. The contract was initially solicited May 2, 2019.
 - Source selection trade-off means the contractor proposes a structured management response plan. Evaluation of the effectiveness of that plan may mean an award is made to an 'other than lowest bid' contractor.
- The regional advanced contract award was for \$5 million.
- USACE maintains an inventory of already awarded contract tools, pre-positioned to support major emergency response missions. These contracts are part of the USACE Advanced Contracting Initiative program developed and implemented specifically for emergency and disaster scenarios such as the Southern California Wildfires.

FEMA MISSION ASSIGNMENTS:

- Regional Activation: USACE received a regional activation mission assignment from FEMA to provide ESF#3 team lead, assistant team lead, and subject matter experts to form part of the planning cell for FEMA.
- Debris: USACE received a FEMA mission assignment Jan. 17, 2025, to execute debris removal.