



For Immediate Release
September 15, 2020

What Wildfire Victims Need to Know About Home Clean-Up

Many of those who suffered loss or damage to homes in our fires want to begin the recovery and rebuilding process as soon as possible. However, it is critical that this work be done safely and by agencies who will test and remove ash and debris from burned home sites. It is also important to know how fire debris must be disposed of and why anyone accessing burned home sites during recovery must wear protective equipment.

Recovery Phase I: Household Hazardous Waste Removal

Monterey County is preparing for Phase 1 clean-up of properties with wildfire damage. The County is coordinating with State and Federal partners to assist homeowners in removal of fire debris. The Phase 1 clean-up is a free service to homeowners which will start with removal of household hazardous waste. Work is expected to begin by the end of this month.

In Phase I, organized teams of experts from the California State Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) inspect property and remove any hazardous waste that may pose a threat to human health, animals, and the environment such as batteries, herbicide, pesticide, propane tanks, asbestos siding, and paints, and e-waste. Property owners will be able to follow the clean-up process for all affected parcels on an online interactive map and properties will also be placarded to identify when Phase I is completed. .

Phase II: Debris Removal and Property Clean-up

Phase II clean-up is removal of all other burn debris including burn ash from the property down to the foundation. Phase II begins after household hazardous waste is removed and Phase I is completed.

What to Do at Your Home/Business Site

Structures that have been destroyed or damaged by fire present health dangers that may not be immediately visible and debris is dangerous to the environment and public if not properly managed.

If you need to visit a burn site:

- **Do Not Disturb The Ash:** It is critical that homeowners and the public do not disturb the burn ash or ash footprint of affected properties; this may jeopardize eligibility for Phase 2. Removal of this ash will be done by experts during Phase I. Do not remove, dig, sift or evaluate property debris as it may contain hazards as mentioned in the description of Phase I activities above.
- **Wear Personal Protective Equipment:** Fire sites are often toxic and include hazardous substances. If you are retrieving valuables from the fire area, you **MUST** wear protective equipment. This link to the Environmental Protection Agency website shows what type of protective gear homeowners should use if retrieving items from their home site: https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/smoke_fires/protect-yourself-from-ash-factsheet.pdf

- **Do Not Dispose of Fire-Damaged Debris:** Fire debris cannot be disposed of in residential or commercial trash collection bins and failure to follow required removal procedures could jeopardize financial assistance and delay the rebuilding process. If you have questions about this process, please contact staff at the Monterey County Health Department, Environmental Health Bureau:
 - Randy McMurray at 831-796-1269
 - Maria Ferdin at 831-755-8915

Additional references on fire recovery can be found at: <https://calepa.ca.gov/disaster/fire/>.

Environmental Reports

Besides ash clean up, state and federal teams are analyzing the fire impact on watershed areas to help guide local recovery planning efforts and mitigate areas that may be prone to winter debris flow. That report is in progress and will be shared with the public as soon as available.

Monterey County Wildfire Recovery Task Force

Monterey County Office of Emergency Service and the County Administrators Office is Co-Leading a Recovery and Mitigation Task Force for the River, Carmel, and Dolan Fires. The Task Force Meets regularly with the purpose of managing and tracking all recovery and mitigation efforts post-fire and pre-winter storms; topics include emergency protective measures, debris removal on public and private land, burn scare and watershed mitigation, and planning for upcoming winter storms. Participants include Monterey County Resource Management Agency-Public Works, Building Services, Environmental Services, Monterey County Environmental Health Bureau, Monterey County Water Resources Agency, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), CALFIRE, Monterey County Regional Fire Protection District, Cachagua Fire, California Geological Survey, National Weather Service, and CalOES.

For more information about recovery visit the Monterey County Recovery Website:

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery>

To receive text message updates regarding recovery efforts such as debris removal progress, text MCFIRES2020 to 888777.

For more information about Phase I and household hazardous waste removal, see the Q&A fact sheet on the next pages.

Carmel and River Fires Recovery Information

Phase 1: Household Hazardous Waste Removal

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) are leading the survey, removal and disposal of household hazardous waste (HHW) at properties affected by the Carmel and River Fires in Monterey County. This HHW removal is Phase 1 of the overall response.

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.

How is HHW removed from properties?

EPA and DTSC will survey each property, then HHW field crews will remove the materials identified during the survey. Local agency officials will accompany these teams.



Some empty containers and tanks will be marked with white paint and left as debris. See Monterey County's website for more information about debris removal:

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery/debris-removal>

Why is HHW removed?

This work will clear the way for the removal of ash and debris, allowing the rebuilding process to begin. Phase 1 is being conducted at no cost to property owners.

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

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

You can search for your address on the Phase 1 Status map (look for the link to “Address Lookup” near the top right of the page):

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery/debris-removal>

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:

- Randy McMurray at 831-796-1269
- Maria Ferdin at 831-755-8915

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

EPA and DTSC 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 (look for the link to “Address Lookup” near the top right of the page):

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery/debris-removal>

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 each day, visit:

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery/debris-removal>

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.

For more information:

For questions regarding Phase 1 HHW removal, contact Monterey County Health Department, Environmental Health Bureau:

- Randy McMurray at 831-796-1269
- Maria Ferdin at 831-755-8915
- or visit <https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery/debris-removal>

For additional information on the Carmel and River Fires recovery, visit

<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery>