

# Frequently Asked Questions About Phase 1 Hazardous Debris Removal by US Environmental Protection Agency

## **Phase 1: Removing hazardous materials from your property**

Phase 1 clean-up of your property by experts from the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](https://www.epa.gov) will happen automatically. They will inspect your property and remove household hazardous materials to prevent potential threats to human health, animals, and the environment. If the property is deemed unsafe for EPA to remove household hazardous materials, the property will be deferred to Phase 2.

The EPA will update their California wildfires website as the work progresses: [www.epa.gov/california-wildfires](https://www.epa.gov/california-wildfires).

You can reach the EPA at:

- **Phone: 833-798-7372**
- **Email: [EPALAWildfiresInfo@epa.gov](mailto:EPALAWildfiresInfo@epa.gov)**

## **Why is this work being done in multiple phases? Why can't EPA embed with the Army Corps to get the work done?**

Both phases of work will be going on concurrently. Working in two phases has proven to expedite the work of clearing property of debris in the wake of multiple fire disasters. That does not mean that the agencies are waiting for one phase to be completely finished across the region before the second phase begins.

On each property, the sequence goes in this order: EPA needs to first clear hazardous material in Phase 1 to expedite the larger debris removal work of the Army Corps of Engineers in Phase 2. Phase 1 is being done under the Governor's emergency order, and can be done without access approval by the property owner. Phase 2 requires permission from the owner through the "right of entry" or ROE process.

Also, while Phase 1 is automatic, residents must opt into Phase 2.

Keep in mind, Phases 1 and 2 may be taking place simultaneously in different areas. The Army Corps of Engineers can begin Phase 2 work in a particular area once Phase 1 work is complete there. They do not have to wait until the EPA completes all Phase 1 work across all burn areas.

## **When does Phase I begin?**

EPA teams began assessing burned properties on Jan. 16. They began collecting hazardous materials from burned properties on Jan. 28.

**What materials are considered hazardous?**

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, or reactive.

Hazardous materials include:

- paints
- cleaners
- solvents
- oils
- batteries
- herbicides
- pesticides
- pool chemicals
- antifreeze
- used oil filters
- fertilizers
- aerosols
- ammunition

EPA crews also will remove visible asbestos, and remove or defuel pressurized fuel cylinders, such as propane tanks. They will mark empty pressurized fuel cylinders with white paint and leave them for Phase 2 debris removal.

[Damaged lithium-ion batteries](#) can be very dangerous. EPA crews will safely remove lithium-ion batteries from electric and hybrid vehicles and home backup power supplies. This process involves de-energizing and decommissioning them for proper recycling and disposal. If you hear a popping, hissing noise or see smoke or fire, move away from your property immediately and call 911.

If firearms, munitions, or suspected remains are found, the EPA will stop work and contact local law enforcement.

**What do I need to do to sign up for cleanup?**

Nothing. EPA Phase 1 cleanup is automatic.

**Who will pay for cleanup?**

The federal government will cover the costs of cleanup.

**Do I have to wait for Phase 1 to be complete before I go home?**

No. All evacuation orders for the Eaton Fire and Palisades Fire have been lifted. You are free to return home, BUT you should take [necessary precautions](#) to protect your health. Be aware that, depending on how badly damaged your community is, you may not have power, clean drinking water and/or may be exposed to hazardous waste.

**Can I remove personal valuables from my damaged or destroyed home?**

Yes. If your property still holds valuable items, now that evacuation orders are lifted, you can return home, taking necessary precautions, and remove your own valuable items.

During the entire debris removal process, workers will use caution not to destroy any valuables that are left behind. During both Phases 1 and 2, if workers come across possessions that are clearly valuable, they will notify law enforcement to do their best to make sure they are returned to their owners.

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. Property owners who wish to search debris for possible salvageable items should do so with caution and with proper protective gear: eye protection, masks, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and appropriate footwear. Residents should minimize contact with fire debris, which may contain materials that can be hazardous to your health. Non-profit groups are also helping residents to sift for personal items. Inquire at the local Disaster Recovery Center.

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)

**I heard that for safety reasons, the EPA won't do cleanup when I am home. Is this true? How will I know what day they are coming?**

Yes, the EPA's hazardous material removal process is inherently dangerous and will be done by trained personnel with personal protective equipment. Residents should stay clear of EPA crews doing their important work. The EPA has stated that if residents are home when they arrive, they will need to skip that property and return at a later date for your safety and theirs. Phase 1 may also have exclusion zones surrounding the current work area to ensure safety of the public.

If you have a particular reason why you should be home during Phase 1 work (for example, you need to unlock a gate around your property to allow workers in) please contact the EPA hotline at 833-798-7372 to inform crews ahead of time.

Generally, you will not receive advance notice of which day EPA will do Phase 1 work on your property. However, you should check the EPA StoryMap to track where EPA crews have recently completed work on EPA's web page: [www.epa.gov/california-wildfires](https://www.epa.gov/california-wildfires).

**How long will this work take?**

While it is difficult to give a precise estimate when all the work will be completed, EPA has been tasked to complete the work in 30 days. EPA is rapidly increasing its staff and expects to have 1,000+ staff in the field in early February.

**How is EPA deciding which properties to clear first?**

EPA has been assessing burned properties since Jan. 16. During this time, EPA has been working with state and local agencies, including the LA County Department of

Public Works, and utility companies to determine the safest and most efficient manner to roll out the crews.

### **How will I know it is done?**

After a cleanup crew completes removing hazardous materials from a property, a [completion sign](#) is placed on site.

The EPA will also update their website each day to show their Phase 1 progress in the affected areas: <https://www.epa.gov/ca/2025-california-wildfires#Storymap>.

### **Where will the EPA take all this hazardous waste?**

The EPA will be taking materials to temporary staging areas, including the federally-owned [Lario Staging Area](#) in Duarte, the [Farnsworth Park](#) and [Altadena Golf Course](#) staging areas in Altadena, for Eaton Fire debris, and the [Topanga Staging Area](#) in Malibu for Palisades Fire debris, with additional staging areas to be identified. Once collected there, the debris will be sorted, secured and packaged for transport to permitted disposal facilities. Watch a video about the process here: [EPA Video](#)

### **What safety measures are being taken at the staging sites?**

EPA implements significant safety and mitigation measures to ensure the public and the environment are not negatively impacted by the temporary staging areas, including:

- Pre-sampling of the area to establish current conditions.
- Lining processing areas with plastic and installing protective measures such as wattles, booms, earthen berms and gravel.
- Continuous perimeter air monitoring.
- Spraying water three times daily to control dust from vehicle traffic.
- Transporting all materials safely from the burn area to the staging area following Department of Transportation standards.
- Packaging and removing waste from the site nearly daily, without ground contact

When Phase 1 is complete, EPA will test the areas again to confirm no negative impact to the environment.

For questions about the safety procedures, please contact the EPA hotline at (833) 798-7372.

### **How are you securing it during transport?**

Hazardous materials will be placed in containers and transported by stake bed trucks to the staging areas. The EPA and Army Corps of Engineers worked with the Department of Transportation to select haul routes to minimize the impact for those who have reoccupied their homes and for unaffected communities. This will include lower-speed travel down city streets, but also will utilize freeways to get to the staging areas. At the secured temporary staging areas, materials will be consolidated and packaged for safe transport and disposal.

### **What if my house isn't destroyed but only damaged?**

Parcels must have a destroyed structure totaling at least 120 square feet to be eligible for EPA Phase 1 clean up. Phase 2 debris removal is only for fire-destroyed houses as identified by local, state or federal agencies. If you are unsure if your property qualifies for the debris-removal program, submit a Right-of-Entry form to [roe@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:roe@dpw.lacounty.gov) so your property may be assessed. For more information visit [recovery.lacounty.gov](https://recovery.lacounty.gov).

**What does “Deferred to Phase 2” mean on the EPA’s StoryMap?**

“Deferred to Phase 2” means that due to the presence of unsafe conditions at the property, household hazardous waste removal crews cannot complete Phase 1 assessment and certification. In this case, household hazardous waste removal activities will be included during Phase 2 removal. If you opt-in to the Consolidated Debris Removal Program (also referred to as the Government-Sponsored Program), household waste removal will be included during Phase 2 debris removal. Property owners who opt-out of the Consolidated Debris Removal Program will be responsible for hiring a certified household hazardous waste removal contractor to remove the debris at their own expense.

**Are burned electronics and appliances (white goods) included in the household hazardous waste cleanup during Phase 1?**

The EPA will collect e-waste that is heat-impacted, easily identifiable, easily accessible, and separable. Collectable e-waste will be in relatively good condition, but non-functioning, and it will be easy to identify the type of device. Examples include microwave ovens, copiers, fax machines, computers, laptops, LCD, plasma and CRT displays, phones and answering machines, routers, peripherals, stereo components, VCRs and calculators. EPA teams handling hazardous waste will not collect damaged white goods such as washing machines, dryers, and other appliances. These materials will be removed during Phase 2 through the Government-Sponsored Program or the Los Angeles County Local Fire Debris Removal Program. For more information visit [recovery.lacounty.gov](https://recovery.lacounty.gov).