

# Frequently Asked Questions About Phase 2 Debris Removal by the US Army Corps of Engineers

**Right of Entry form is required if you want the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do work free of charge. Those opting out should also submit the form to avoid delaying work in their communities.**

## **What is the role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps of Engineers) in debris cleanup?**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is executing Phase 2 of the federally funded debris cleanup effort on behalf of FEMA. This is formally known as the Consolidated Debris Removal Program (also referred to as the Government-Sponsored Program). 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](http://recovery.lacounty.gov). Their responsibility is to remove fire-related debris from private properties, including hazardous trees, ash and structural remains. On a property-by-property basis, this work will follow the EPA's initial hazardous materials removal in Phase 1. However, the Army Corps of Engineers will not wait until all of the EPA work is done throughout the burn areas before stepping in to begin their Phase 2 work. Phase 1 and Phase 2 work will happen at the same time across both the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire areas.

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

Phase 2 involves removing visible fire debris, such as chimneys, hazardous trees, ash and, if specified on the right-of-entry (ROE) form by the owner, foundations. See the [Army Corps of Engineers website](#) for additional information on the debris-removal process and associated FAQs.

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

The Army Corps of Engineers will begin debris removal as the EPA completes its work in individual neighborhoods and a large number of residents complete right-of-entry (ROE) forms to opt in to have the Army Corps of Engineers clear their properties of debris.

Within the communities affected by fire, 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. The two agencies are not waiting for one phase to be completely finished across the region before the second phase begins.

On each individual 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. The Army Corps of Engineers will follow behind EPA and clear Phase 2 debris as well as household hazardous material not removed by the EPA.

### **What does the Army Corps of Engineers remove?**

The Army Corps of Engineers crews are responsible for removing:

- Chimneys
- Hazardous trees (dead or at risk of dying within five years)
- Fire ash and debris
- Foundations (if specified in the ROE)
- Up to 6 inches of soil in the ash footprint (if necessary and safe to do so)
- Household hazardous materials not removed in Phase 1 by the EPA

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

Slope stabilizing structural walls and other foundational elements will not be removed if their removal could destabilize the property or neighboring areas.

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

Verified ROEs 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 cleanup takes. See the [Army Corps of Engineers website](#) for more information on the debris-removal process and associated FAQs.

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

The Army Corps of Engineers is 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. It will not be possible to estimate how long it will take to clean up your property until the contractor assesses the site. And for the same reasons, we cannot accurately predict at this time how long the overall cleanup effort will take.

**What do I have to do to get this work underway?**

Sign a right-of-entry (ROE) form giving the Army Corps of Engineers access to your property. The form can be found at [recovery.lacounty.gov/debris-removal](https://recovery.lacounty.gov/debris-removal).

**What is the deadline to file a right-of-entry (ROE) form?**

The deadline to opt into the government sponsored debris removal program is April 15, 2025. You should fill out the form as soon as possible, unless you are opting out of free debris removal by Army Corps of Engineers. Debris removal by the Army Corps of Engineers cannot proceed until you submit your form. **Failing to submit the ROE form by April 15, 2025 is considered opting out.**

**If I fill out the ROE form first, will my home be cleared first?**

No, the debris removal process is not a first-come, first-served process. There are a number of factors that determine when everyone's lot will be scheduled for Phase 2 debris removal. To maximize efficiency, contractors schedule their work based on priorities set by the federal government with input from County. But getting your forms in early – and encouraging your neighbors to do so as well – will speed the work in your neighborhood.

**My home is still standing, do I need to fill out the ROE form?**

If you have a destroyed structure on your property, please fill out and submit the form.

**What happens if I opt in?**

If you opt in, the debris removal will be performed for you by the Army Corps of Engineers, with no out-of-pocket cost. Your insurance payment for debris removal will be assigned to the government to help pay for the work; even if the insurance payment does not fully cover the work, the work will be performed at no charge to you. **You do not need insurance to participate in the program.**

**What if I want to handle debris removal myself through a private contractor? What happens if I opt out?**

If you opt out of the program, you must receive approval from the County and a permit from the applicable local city authority to proceed with debris removal. 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 in order to handle the debris removal if I opt out?**

If you opt out of the program, once the EPA has completed its Phase 1 work, you will be responsible for hiring the appropriately licensed and certified contractors to remove the debris. This will include retaining a Certified Asbestos Consultant (CAC) to conduct a survey to identify asbestos in debris. If the CAC finds asbestos, you will need to hire an abatement contractor; and the CAC 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. Private contractors must also adhere to the same haul routes and safety standards being used by the Army Corps of Engineers to minimize neighborhood disruption. Please check in regularly for additional information and updates on specific regulations at [recovery.lacounty.gov](https://recovery.lacounty.gov) or call the LA County Public Works Fire Debris Hotline at 844-347-3332.

**If I opt in, can I opt back out even after I submitted my ROE form?**

Yes, if you submit the ROE form and then decide to opt out, you can do so. However, it may cause delays.

**If I opt out, can I opt in again?**

Once your opt out application is approved, your permit issued, and any work is begun on your property, you cannot opt back in. You will bear the full cost of debris removal and disposal.

**If I do not fill out the ROE form and opt out of Phase 2, will I be deprioritized for Phase 1?**

No.

**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. As ROEs are collected and ownership is verified, 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.

**Do I have to wait until all of the hazardous debris is cleared everywhere in LA County for Phase 2 to start?**

No, Phase 1 and Phase 2 will run concurrently. Once each cluster of properties is cleared under Phase 1, the Army Corps of Engineers can begin Phase 2 cleanup on properties where ROEs have been submitted, and ownership has been verified.

**What happens if I own a condo? Does the entire building need to agree and file?**

Generally, yes, but the recommendation is that each owner of a destroyed unit submit a ROE form as well as the HOA.

**What about trailer parks? As the owner of an individual trailer on leased land, do I need to file the ROE or does the park owner need to file?**

If the land under the trailer(s) is owned by an individual or entity beside the trailer owner, then the landowner must request removal.

### **How does the Army Corps of Engineers 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
- 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.

### **What happens with hazardous trees?**

A hazard tree is any tree in immediate danger of falling onto the crews that will be working to remove your debris or a public road. Hazard trees must be removed to protect the debris team and eliminate the immediate threat to the public at large. The debris management teams will remove trees that are a threat to the safety of the debris removal crews working on the property and trees that are dead or likely to die within five years as a result of the fire, as determined by a certified arborist, as well as those that present a threat to public health and safety public roadways or easements, and/or to public infrastructure, fire hydrants, water meters, etc.

### **Will the Army Corps of Engineers remove damaged hardscape, including swimming pools, driveways, chimneys, and foundations?**

You will need to indicate on the ROE whether you want your foundation removed. The Army Corps of Engineers will also remove chimneys. In-ground pools and driveways will not be removed.

### **How do I decide whether to remove my foundation?**

In general, the structural integrity of concrete and masonry can adversely be affected in fire situations, especially when the structure is completely consumed by the fire. The properties of the material may be irreversibly altered deeming it unsatisfactory for reuse in supporting a rebuilt structure.

For property owners participating in the Government-Sponsored Program you have a choice to remove or keep foundations in place. Please contact your local building official for additional information about policies and procedures for the reuse of foundations in order to inform your decision. If you would like a structural assessment of your foundation you must work with your own private engineer to evaluate your foundation.

For more information, please watch this video from Public Works: [Why Removing Fire-Damaged Concrete is Critical to Rebuilding Safely](#).

### **Will they 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, the Army Corps of Engineers will demo and remove the fire debris.

### **How will I know when the Army Corps of Engineers will clear my property?**

If you opted-in to the Government-Sponsored Program for Phase 2, the operational crews will attempt to contact you 72 hours prior to starting debris removal work on your property. In the meantime, please ensure assessment and safety crews are able to access your property by unlocking gates and/or providing access codes to the EPA by calling (833) 798-7372 or, for Phase 2, that information can be provided to the Army Corps' contractor when they contact you to schedule a site visit. You can also contact the Army Corps' debris call center at (213) 308-8305.

### **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 in order 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 (ROE) form.

### **I don't have any burned structures on my property, but I have burned trees, am I eligible for the Government-Sponsored Consolidated Debris Removal Program?**

No. This debris removal program is for fire-destroyed houses only, as identified by local, state or federal agencies.

### **What happens to soil contaminated by ash?**

Crews typically scrape 6" inches of soil around 2 to 5' feet from the ash footprint.

### **After debris clearance and soil removal, what are the next steps?**

Once the debris management teams have ensured that the cleanup meets the program standards, contractors will return to install erosion control methods. The

debris management teams will then report to the County that the debris removal is complete. The County will then notify you that your property is safe and ready for rebuilding.

**Can residents be present during the cleanup of their personal property if participating in the Government-Sponsored Program (Phase 2)?**

The safety of the general public and workers is a priority during debris operations. Yes, you may be present for Phase 2, but to reduce risks from safety hazards, the public is encouraged to stay away from areas where debris removal operations are underway. During Phase 1, 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.

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

The debris management 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?**

The Debris Task Force's safety professionals and contractor safety staff ensure work is complying 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.

**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 (Phase 2) 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. If you do have insurance that covers this work, the government will ask your insurance company, not you, for reimbursement of costs up to the limits of that specific coverage.

**I heard that the Army Corps of Engineers will take some of my insurance money to pay for cleanup. What does that mean? Who will pay for the debris removal? How does the insurance collection process work?**



All upfront costs will be paid by government agencies. However, if property owners have homeowners, secondary, or automobile insurance covering debris removal, owners must inform the County by indicating that coverage on their ROE. The County has been assigned the responsibility to collect insurance proceeds. The County will work with insurance providers to ensure any proceeds **specifically for debris removal** are assigned to the government. **Please note, Federal government agencies, such as FEMA, USEPA, and USACE, will NOT contact you to collect ANY payment related to the Government Sponsored Program.**

If you have insurance that covers debris removal, your insurance company will assign the proceeds of **that specific coverage** to the Army Corps of Engineers to reimburse costs up to the limits of that specific coverage. There is no direct cost to you. If you do not have insurance, nothing is required beyond submitting your ROE. If you contract to do this work yourself, your insurance company will handle your costs as a direct claim to be paid to you.

**If I have homeowner's insurance, can I participate in the Government-Sponsored Program?**

Yes. However, to avoid a duplication of benefits provided by the government, the County will work with insurance providers to ensure any proceeds specifically designated for debris removal are assigned to the government.

For more information regarding insurance claims, coverage, or understanding your policy, please visit the California Department of Insurance website at:

<http://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/WildfireResources.cfm>

or call the Insurance Consumer Hotline at (800) 927-4357.

**What portion of my homeowner's policy will the government collect for debris removal?**

It depends on the policy that you have. There are generally two types of debris removal coverage in a homeowners insurance policy:

- Specified Amount: If your homeowners insurance policy contains a separate, debris-specific clause, the County will only seek the specified amount designated in the debris removal clause. These clauses are typically capped at a percentage of the coverage amounts listed in the policy (for example, 5 percent of the value of a primary structure, other structure, and personal property). **You will not owe the County any additional money, even if the actual costs to remove the debris exceeded the amount designated in your insurance policy for debris removal.**
- No Specified Amount: If your homeowners insurance policy does not have a separate, debris-specific clause and instead includes the costs of debris



removal in the total coverage, the County will only collect insurance

proceeds for debris removal after you have rebuilt your home. The County will only collect any available insurance proceeds, if any, after the rebuild. **If there are no remaining funds, the homeowner will not owe the County any additional money for debris removal.**

**If I participate in the Government-Sponsored Program, will the County have the right to take all of my insurance proceeds?**

No. The County will only work with insurance carriers to seek debris removal specific assignments as stated above. The County will not attempt to collect any insurance proceeds designated for other uses such as rebuilding.

**Can I use my debris removal insurance policy to remove items that are ineligible for removal under the Government-Sponsored Program?**

Yes. If you have a specified amount for debris removal in your insurance policy, you may use your insurance proceeds to remove fire related debris that is ineligible for removal under the program (for example, swimming pools, patios, trees, etc.). The County will only collect remaining insurance proceeds, if any, after you have removed fire-related debris not included as part of the Government Sponsored Program.

If your homeowner's insurance policy does not have a separate, debris-specific clause and instead includes the costs of debris removal in the total coverage, you may use these proceeds to pay for the removal of fire-related debris that is not included as part of the Government-Sponsored Program. The County will only collect remaining insurance proceeds, if any, after your residence is rebuilt.

In either scenario, the property owner will be required to substantiate all expenditures. For more information regarding insurance claims, coverage, or understanding your policy,

please visit the California Department of Insurance website at <http://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/WildfireResources.cfm>

or call the Insurance Consumer Hotline at (800) 927-4357.

Property owners are advised **not to begin clearing remaining ineligible debris** until Phase 2 has been completed on their property as this may affect eligibility to participate in the program.

**Will vehicles on private property be removed?**

If property owners of a structure destroyed by the fire choose to opt-in to the Government Sponsored Program, then burned vehicles on the property will be removed as part of the clean-up. If burned vehicles on private property are not covered or blocked by structural fire debris, property owners can work directly with

their insurance company to have the vehicle towed from their property prior to Phase 2 debris removal.

**Will my pool be drained as part of the Government-Sponsored Program?**

The Army Corps of Engineers advises that pool water may be pumped out of swimming pools for wetting the debris which is used to keep dust down during the debris removal process. Any fire debris in the pool will be removed by the contractor. Contractor will place metal fencing completely around the pool where feasible and notify the homeowner. This only pertains to pools adjacent to structures that are considered within the ash footprint.

**How do I maintain my pool impacted by smoke and ash contamination, or fire damage?**

Please see Los Angeles County Public Health's guidelines for Swimming Pools Impacted by Fire, Smoke, and Ash:

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh//docs/safety/swimming-pools-after-fire.pdf>

For more information, please contact the Environmental Health, Recreational Waters Program at (626) 430-5360 or [rhealth@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:rhealth@ph.lacounty.gov).