

# DEBRIS REMOVAL AFTER A MAJOR DISASTER

## *For Property Owners*

When a community is struck by a major disaster, there will be a significant amount of debris. Property owners are asked to separate the debris on their land into different piles for pickup. While this process may be burdensome, this sorting process aids local governments in seeking federal reimbursement for removal costs. Property owners play an important role in the cost and speed of their community's recovery.

### WHY PROPERTY OWNERS ARE ASKED TO SEPARATE DEBRIS

#### FEMA REIMBURSEMENT

The local government may be eligible for reimbursement by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for debris removal expenses. Residential areas will qualify for reimbursement if the debris impacts a significant portion of the community, and its removal is in the public interest.

FEMA requires local governments to separate debris. Your local government may not receive reimbursement for debris pickup if the community does not comply with debris separation instructions. If your local government does not receive the federal reimbursement, then your local tax dollars will go towards debris pickup rather than other necessary recovery efforts that are not supplemented by the federal government. By complying with the local government's instructions on debris pickup, property owners enable their local government to be eligible to receive reimbursement, thereby lowering the cost of this recovery process.

Local governments following FEMA's debris removal guidelines have the opportunity to seek reimbursement for removal costs. Property owners can help by complying with the requests of local governments to ensure eligibility for reimbursement.

#### PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

The local government hires trucks to pick up specific types of debris and take it to another location for disposal or repurposing. For example, there will be a truck tasked with picking up vegetative debris only; this truck will not pick up other types of debris. Therefore, it is necessary for property owners to make separate piles of debris, or else their debris will not be removed from the property. When property owners miss the window to have their debris picked up by government contractors, it becomes their individual responsibility to remove it. If property owners leave debris out for a significant period after the emergency, they risk being fined for failure to maintain their property, depending on the rules and regulations of their neighborhood and community.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

When a community properly separates debris, the environment is positively impacted. After disasters, a large percentage of materials can be recycled when they are properly separated in accordance with a community's debris removal plan. If property owners do not separate their debris, it is likely that it will end up in landfills rather than being repurposed. Specifically, separating vegetative debris significantly reduces the overall volume of debris. This vegetative debris can then be repurposed for use in fuel, agriculture, landscaping, and tree recovery. So, by separating debris, property owners aid not only in the cleanup process, but the rebuilding process as well. Disasters can be harmful to the environment, but by separating debris, property owners play a significant role in mitigating the harm caused.



## HOW TO SEPARATE DEBRIS

Following a disaster, property owners are instructed to place their debris into specific categories. The categories are based on the local government's debris management plan. The separated piles of debris should be located on the edge of the property nearest the road; the debris should not be leaning against any structures or blocking the roadway. All debris must be disaster generated to qualify for FEMA reimbursement.

*Typical household trash is not included in debris management plans. Everyday trash should be put out as usual for regularly scheduled pickup.*

## CATEGORIES OF DEBRIS

FEMA lays out several different categories of debris. These are examples of the categories that your local government will specify when they communicate their individualized plan to the community.

*Vegetative debris*, also known as green waste or materials, consists of trees, plants, and their parts, including any leafy material.

*Construction and demolition debris* consists of damaged parts of structures such as wood, glass, metal, roofing material, pipe, concrete, or furniture.

*Hazardous wastes* are wastes that are potentially harmful to people or the environment. If waste exhibits one of the following qualities it is considered hazardous: ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, toxicity. This type of waste must be kept separately from other piles of debris. Examples include paints, stains, varnishes, solvents, cleaning products, or pesticides.

*Electronic wastes* can be considered hazardous wastes, but they are usually separated into their own pile because they contain different hazardous materials. Examples of electronic wastes include televisions and computer monitors.

*White goods* are discarded household appliances. This type of waste is considered hazardous but must be separated into its own category because it contains specific types of hazardous materials. Examples include refrigerators, air conditioners, heaters, ovens, or washing machines.



## RESOURCES

Find your disaster declaration at FEMA's disaster declaration website: <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/declarations>

Find Louisiana's disaster response information at The State of Louisiana's Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness: <https://gohsep.la.gov>

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