



Debris Management Guidance

ABOUT: Disaster debris management is a key recovery responsibility of local government. This guidance document is intended to assist local governments conduct debris management operations in a manner that maximizes potential reimbursement, aligns with operational best practices, and complies with applicable laws and regulations.

ELIGIBILITY: Depending on what assistance is approved for your county, debris management operations may be eligible for reimbursement from FEMA or Cal OES. Generally, only the removal of disaster-generated debris from public rights of way and public property is eligible for reimbursement. Disaster-generated debris includes downed trees and branches, sediment, mud, and rocks resulting from debris flows, household hazardous waste, and construction and demolition debris from public buildings or from private residential structures if placed on public property. Debris removal directly from private property is generally ineligible unless necessary to protect public health and safety. [For more information on eligibility, refer to FEMA's Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide \(Version 4\) and FEMA's Procurement Disaster Assistance Team Field Manual.](#)

OPERATIONS: Debris management operations after a major storm or flood generally align with one of two approaches:

- 1. Curbside Collection:** Collection of debris placed on the curb of the public right of way for collection, offsite processing (if necessary) and reuse/disposal. May include debris resulting from emergency road clearance operations and debris placed on the right of way by residents (including vegetative debris and construction and demolition debris). This operation generally involves grapple trucks or light equipment passing through affected areas to collect debris, processing/reduction at a temporary debris management site, and disposal at recyclers or landfills.
- 2. Collection Centers:** Collection at a central point on public property where residents drop off debris for processing and reuse/disposal. This operation generally involves placement of roll off bins on public property, monitoring of debris dropped off by residents, transport of bins to a debris management site for processing/reduction (if necessary), and reuse/disposal at recyclers or landfills



Curbside debris collection after the 2019 Russian River Flooding (Sonoma)

Strong public information is key to either approach. For more information on operations, refer to [FEMA's Public Assistance Debris Management Guide](#).



MONITORING: Consistent monitoring of contracted debris management operations is required to ensure only eligible debris is managed and costs are properly documented. Debris monitoring involves government or third party contractor staff observing all debris collection (including of bins or collection centers), processing, and disposal. Monitors document types, quantities, and locations of debris, and ensuring debris contractors only collect eligible debris. For more information on debris monitoring, refer to [FEMA's Public Assistance Debris Monitoring Guide \(March 2021\)](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE: Several Federal and State environmental laws apply to debris management operations and consultation with regulatory agencies prior to and during debris management operations is critical. Cal OES has a fulltime disaster recovery environmental team that can assist local governments coordinate with regulators. Key environmental compliance issues include:

1. **Stormwater and Water Quality:** Regional Water Quality Control Board permits are often required for temporary debris management sites and other facilities. Please refer to the [State Water Board's General Waste Discharge Requirements for Disaster Related Wastes](#).
2. **Household Hazardous Waste:** Household hazardous waste (HHW) must be segregated, specially handled, and disposed of at permitted facilities. [Additional information is available from the Department of Toxic Substances Control \(DTSC\)](#). When mission tasked by Cal OES, DTSC can also deploy crews for HHW removal.
3. **Landfills:** Emergency Waivers from the Local Enforcement Agency and CalRecycle may be required to allow landfills to accept debris. [Additional information is available from CalRecycle](#).

In certain circumstances, permits or consultation may be needed for sensitive biological, archaeological, or historic sites.

FEDERAL AND STATE ASSISTANCE: Potential financial assistance is provided through the Public Assistance Program; it is important that local governments work closely with State and Federal Public Assistance staff when planning and implementing debris management operations. Additionally, technical assistance is available from Cal OES, CalRecycle, and other State and Federal agencies to local governments who require additional subject matter expertise in planning and implementing debris management operations. In circumstances where debris management needs exceed local capacity, direct State or Federal assistance including from DTSC and CalRecycle may be available pursuant to the Standardized Emergency Management System.

Master Service Agreement for Debris Assessment and Monitoring

The State of California has an active master service agreement for debris assessment and monitoring which is available to any local government.

[Master Agreement User Instructions](#)

[Complete Master Agreement](#)