



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®

# Northern California Wildfires 2017

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USACE Media Line: 601-619-9844

## Frequently Asked Questions regarding Debris Removal Operations in Lake, Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma Counties *As of 10 Dec 2017*

### Mission Overview

- The Consolidated Debris Removal Program resulting from the wildfires in October 2017, is a two-phase process – Phase I is the removal of household hazardous waste (HHW) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Sonoma and Napa counties and by the California Department of Toxic Substance Control in Lake and Mendocino counties. Phase II is the removal of other fire-related debris from structures destroyed by the fire, and is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- Since Phase II work began on 2 November, USACE contractors have completed debris removal on 1,448 properties – 26% of all Rights of Entry that have been received by USACE in all four counties.
- USACE is committed to completing the mission in early 2018 to help communities prepare for rebuilding.
- Property owners with questions about eligibility, operations or other concerns can contact the USACE Debris Removal Information Line at 877-875-7681. The line is staffed 8 a.m. – 7 p.m., 7 days a week.
- USACE has also been assigned a Watershed Technical Assistance mission from FEMA to help assess the impacts from the fires on local watersheds. We are working with FEMA, California Geologic Society (CGS), USDA Forest Service/NRCS, CalFire, CalOES, CalTrans and local Government Resident Engineers/Water Agency on a GIS / Hydraulic Flood analysis to identify potential flood or erosion risks for hazard mitigation and awareness.

### Process

Q: What is a Right of Entry (ROE) form?

A: *Right of Entry (ROE) form gives government contractors permission to access your property and begin debris cleanup. These forms were coordinated between the Corps and the counties. The final deadlines for submitting a ROE was on 13 November 2017*

Q: After I turn in an ROE to my county, what happens next?

A: *First, your county will vet your ROE and ensure everything has been filled out correctly as well as cross check property records to verify that the person submitting the ROE is the property owner. Afterwards, the ROE is transferred to USACE for processing and scheduling.*

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – SACRAMENTO DISTRICT**

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[www.twitter.com/USACESacramento](https://www.twitter.com/USACESacramento)

Q: When will my debris be cleared?

A: *There are a number of factors that determine when your lot will be scheduled for debris removal. Contractors are responsible for planning their work, based on priorities set by Cal OES and partners, with input from county and city governments, to maximize efficiency.*

*The number of crews working in any given location will fluctuate through the life of the mission. These operational changes are not the result of a lack of funding or any significant concerns with the contractors' operations.*

Q: What debris is being removed, and why?

A: *Debris falls into two broad categories: Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) and fire-related debris, such as timber, bricks, mortar, etc. HHW will be removed in the first phase of debris removal, and is being conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for Sonoma and Napa Counties and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control for Lake and Mendocino Counties. Removal of HHW is virtually complete. The second phase consists of removing burned remnants of homes and contaminated structures. In Lake, Mendocino, Sonoma and Napa Counties, the Corps is overseeing debris removal. The California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) is leading debris removal in Yuba, Butte and Nevada Counties.*

Q: What is the expected timeline for debris to be removed from a property?

A: *The Corps is aiming for debris to be safely removed in two to three days per property. However, this timeline can change depending on the size of a lot, the amount of debris and other factors, so it may take longer to remove debris. Soil testing will be conducted after initial debris removal is complete to ensure the lot is safe for rebuilding.*

Q: What is soil testing? Why is this being performed, and how? Who tests the soil?

A: *The Corps conducts soil monitoring after initial debris removal is complete to ensure that there is no residual contamination and that the lot is safe for rebuilding. Crews scrape 3 – 6" of soil from the ash footprint and samples are sent to a state-approved lab for analysis. The results are compared against a background sample taken from the burn area to ensure that all contaminated ash was removed. If necessary, more soil is removed and the site is retested until it comes back clear of contaminants. All soil testing results are returned to the Corps for final review and validation.*

Q: After debris clearance and soil testing, what are the next steps?

A: *Once the Corps has ensured that contractors have removed all eligible debris and soil testing meets California state standards, contractors will return to install erosion control methods. The Corps will then report to your county and the state of California that your lot is clear. Your county will then notify you that your property is safe and ready for rebuilding.*

Q: If I had asbestos on my property, will that slow debris removal?

A: *Asbestos removal is being handled by the Environmental Protection Agency. Once asbestos materials are removed from the property, the Army Corps of Engineers process can begin; the debris removal process for all properties are expected to be completed in early 2018.*

Q: Where is the debris taken to?

A: *Debris is being separated into metals, concrete, soil and ash. Recyclable materials such as concrete and metal are being recycled by area facilities. Other items are being disposed in approved hazardous waste landfills, due to ash being considered a public health threat.*

## **USACE**

Q: If I want to contact the Army Corps of Engineers, who can I call?

*A: If you questions about debris removal eligibility, operations or other concerns, you can reach the Corps at its Debris Removal Information Line at 877-875-7681. The line is staffed 8 A.M. to 7 P.M., seven days a week.*

## **Contracts**

*Q: How are contracts awarded and who have they been awarded to?*

*A: After USACE received the debris removal mission assignment from FEMA in late October 2017, they utilized the USACE Advanced Contracting Initiative (ACI) to award task orders (contracts) to ECC and AshBritt to jumpstart the debris removal process. These task orders have financial limits and ECC, which started debris removal operations first, is approaching the limit of its task order. ECC will continue to work until its terms are met, but the public will see some adjustments in how and where their crews operate. It is planned that ECC will complete removal on all properties on which it has begun debris clearance.*

*The Corps awarded a additional task order to AshBritt under the ACI on 9 Dec. and the company will continue to conduct debris removal operations until the task order reaches its financial limit. They will work in all four counties, not just Sonoma County as initially assigned.*

*Q. What happens when AshBritt reaches the limit of its task orders?*

*A. There will be changes in debris removal activity for a few weeks during the transition from the emergency contracts to a new contract or new contracts, but debris removal continues in all counties.*

*Q: How do contractors hire their subcontractors? Can I see what companies have been subcontracted?*

*A: The prime contractors generally hire subcontractors based on the need of the contract. USACE does not determine who the prime contractor sub-contracts work to, nor does the government determine how many crews a contractor hires. The contractor manages its manpower and resources as it sees fit to accomplish the mission. The government does not release the names of subcontractor to the public as they are contracts between the prime and the subcontractors.*

*Q: Will the change in contracts result in delays in the debris removal process?*

*A: There will be changes in debris removal activity for a few weeks as we transition between the emergency contracts to the new contract(s). Contractors are responsible for planning their work, based on priorities set by Cal OES and partners, with input from county and city governments, to maximize efficiency. The number of crews working in any given location will fluctuate through the life of the mission. These operational changes are not the result of a lack of funding or any significant concerns with the contractors' operations.*

*Debris removal is not the only component of the process – other ongoing actions include site assessments; EPA asbestos removal; soil testing; and installation of final erosion control measures after all the debris removal is complete.*

*Q: What is the budget for the California Wildfire Debris Removal?*

*A: USACE working with FEMA to determine what is required to complete the mission; however, all property owners that have signed up for the consolidated debris removal program will have their debris removed.*

*Q: Do you know what the financial status is of the contractors?*

*A: When the original ACI contracts were awarded the contractors' financial capabilities were checked prior to award.*

## **Safety/Environmental**

*Q. How will the US Army Corps of Engineers contractors monitor air quality during Phase II debris removal operations?*

*A. There are three levels of air monitoring: Personal, Perimeter and Community. Crews on site are participating in Personal Air Monitoring, in which employees wear devices on their PPE to collect air samples during the course of a standard work shift. Perimeter Air Monitoring includes monitors at the edge of the work zone.*

*In order to ensure that the debris removal work is not harmful to the public, USACE contractors are responsible for establishing a Community Air Monitoring (CAM) Program. Three air sampling stations and one weather station will be established, one upwind of the work site, one downwind, and one receptor at the nearest sensitive site, such as an inhabited residence, school, nursing home, etc. Air monitoring results are shared with the contractors to disseminate to the workers and released to county health officials for dissemination to the public.*

*Each CAM station consists of real-time data-logging monitors to measure particulate concentrations, high-volume and low-volume asbestos and heavy metals. A number of response actions might be taken if certain levels are reached, including implementation of additional ash suppression measures. These measures could include:*

- Increasing pre-wetting time*
- Adding additional water to dusty operations in the form of a mist*
- Limiting drop heights when loading trucks*
- Lowering speed of removal equipment*
- Applying foam or wetting agents*

*T date, all testing results have shown n reportable risks associated with the debris removal operations to either workers or the public.*

**Q:** How is the Corps protecting our rivers, streams and aquifers from contamination?

*A: The contractors are required to put in erosion controls on the site as well as use silt collection devices around storm drains to minimize impacts to rivers, streams and the aquifers. They are also taking measures such as wrapping the debris in trucks to minimize particles traveling from the air to the water.*

**Q:** I've seen contractors in Tyvek/hazmat suits. Should I wear one too? Am I at risk?

*A: Workers wearing Tyvek suits are closest to the work, and wearing the suits voluntarily as a extra precaution, especially if they are the first work crews who have entered the worksites in the aftermath. The primary method of preventing personal contamination are the controls on-site to reduce ash and dust.*

**Q:** I've seen contractors wearing varying levels of protective clothing. Why is this?

*A: The primary method of protecting people on an near the debris removal sites are the engineering an administrative controls used on-site, such as wetting the ash piles to reduce dust. While different contractors working on the debris removal program have made different decisions about the types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be used in the field, they have all been fully compliant with safety regulations and contract terms.*

**Q:** Who ensures compliance with safety and environmental regulations?

*A. USACE Safety Professionals ensure work is complying with all OSHA, Cal/OSHA and state and federal EPA standards.*

**Q:** What safety and environmental regulations are contractors required to comply with?

*A: 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.*

## **Progress**

**Q:** How are you measuring progress with debris removal?

*A: Debris removal is being measured in a variety of ways. The Corps tracks the number of ROEs processed, the number of lots currently being cleared, the cumulative tonnage of removed debris, lots undergoing soil testing and lots turned back over to the county.*

*Q: How can I see the progress being made with debris removal?*

*A: You can find a lot of information on debris removal and recovery processes at [wildfirerecovery.org](http://wildfirerecovery.org). Information is also available on the Sacramento District's Facebook and Twitter accounts at [www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/](https://www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/) and [twitter.com/USACE Sacramento](https://twitter.com/USACE_Sacramento).*

*Q: How many tons of debris have been removed?*

*A: The total grows each day as we continue to remove debris from properties in Lake, Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma counties. As of Dec. 9, 2017, crews have removed 419,889 tons of debris. You can track progress on the Sacramento District's Facebook and Twitter accounts at [www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/](https://www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/) and [twitter.com/USACE Sacramento](https://twitter.com/USACE_Sacramento).*

*Q: How many parcels have been cleared of debris?*

*A: The total grows each day as we continue to remove debris from properties. As of Dec. 4, 2017, there have been 1,482 parcels cleared in Lake, Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma counties. You can track progress on the Sacramento District's Facebook and Twitter accounts at [www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/](https://www.facebook.com/sacramentodistrict/) and [twitter.com/USACE Sacramento](https://twitter.com/USACE_Sacramento).*

*Q: How are contractors being tracked for the work being done?*

*A: The Corps has final sign-off on work completed by a contractor, confirming all eligible debris is removed and soil testing has met state standards. The Corps reports this information to your county and the State of California.*

*Q: Will the debris removal process be complete by early 2018?*

*A: USACE continues to track progress and is committed to completing the mission in early 2018 to help communities prepare for rebuilding.*