

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.

You can reach the EPA at:

- **Phone: 833-798-7372**
- **Email: 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 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?

Hazardous materials include:

- paints
- cleaners
- solvents
- oils
- batteries
- herbicides
- pesticides

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.

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.

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.

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.

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: www.epa.gov/california-wildfires.

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 for Eaton Fire debris and the Topanga Creek staging area in Malibu for Palisades Fire debris, with additional staging areas to be identified. Once collected there, the debris will be secured and transported to permitted disposal facilities. Private citizens are not allowed to drop hazardous materials at these facilities.

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.