

Information for residential property owners opting out of government-assisted wildfire cleanup



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

2020 Oregon Wildfires

DEQ strongly recommends property owners NOT perform cleanup themselves because it is dangerous. The State of Oregon is working with federal, state and local partners to safely address ash and debris from the 2020 Oregon wildfires. Removing fire debris is a two-step cleanup process.

- **Step 1** is clearing properties of household hazardous waste to minimize exposure of hazardous materials to the public.
- **Step 2** is removal of ash, debris and burned-out structures.

Find more information about the state-led cleanup process at wildfire.oregon.gov/cleanup

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DEQ is a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon's air, land and water.

If you choose to do cleanup yourself

If you choose to do wildfire cleanup yourself, it will be at your own cost. Removal of household hazardous waste and debris can be an incredibly expensive process, costing as much as \$75,000. Even with insurance, a majority of this cost may not be covered. The state and federal government is committed to paying for removal of household hazardous waste from 2020 wildfires, which means that property owners can reserve their insurance funds for other recovery efforts.

DEQ strongly urges property owners not to remove hazardous materials and debris themselves because of the potential risks to health and safety. If you do choose to take on ash and debris cleanup yourself, DEQ strongly recommends that you hire a DEQ licensed asbestos abatement contractor to do the work, to protect you and your family from the risk of exposure to asbestos.

The Environmental Quality Commission approved a variance from certain asbestos requirements in the context of wildfire cleanup. Some aspects of this variance apply to cleanup

by a DEQ licensed contractor, and others apply to residential property owners doing their own cleanup. See the DEQ [wildfire temporary rules suspension webpage](#) for more information.

[View the Asbestos and Fire Debris Cleanup Flowchart](#)

In addition, when cleaning up wildfire debris, please do the following:

- **Contact your insurance provider** before you begin cleanup to learn of requirements they may have for reimbursement.
- **Contact your county or city code enforcement agency** to determine their cleanup requirements for new construction permits.
- **Determine if the ash and debris contain asbestos.** Many homes and buildings have materials with asbestos. State rules govern various aspects of



Debris from wildfires in Jackson County

managing and removing asbestos. You can hire an [accredited inspector](#) to survey your property for asbestos-containing materials, or you can presume that all debris and ash contain asbestos. DEQ strongly recommends hiring a [licensed abatement contractor](#) to perform any abatement activities. Asbestos is a known carcinogen and there is no known safe level of exposure. Refer to guidance on [DEQ's asbestos webpage](#) or contact DEQ prior to starting any ash or debris cleanup activities.

- **Contact your [local waste disposal site](#)** to learn what requirements they have for waste acceptance. Many landfills require specific documentation of the waste you drop off so they can handle it properly and comply with regulations. This can include lab results to determine what hazardous materials are in your debris. If you do not have the proper documentation, you may not be allowed to dispose of your debris.
- **Cover ash and debris loads during transport.** Additionally, asbestos containing waste materials must be wetted down to prevent airborne particles and packaged properly for transport and disposal. This

means double bagging the material in 6 mil plastic sheeting, and labeling it as asbestos.

- **Recycle metal, concrete and wood debris.** Clean recyclable materials with water prior to transport to reduce the spread of asbestos or other contaminants in the ash. Do not discharge water containing ash into the stormwater system or surface waters, as it can cause water quality issues.

Recommended soil sampling for residential property owners

Ash and debris may include various hazardous materials. Toxic metals, such as arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury, and selenium, are most often present following a fire. These and other substances may contaminate the soil beneath the ash and debris impacted area.

DEQ recommends that residential property owners hire a licensed professional to conduct soil sampling immediately following the completion of wildfire debris removal

activities. At a minimum, impacted areas should be sampled and analyzed for the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) 8 metals (arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury, selenium, and silver).

See the tables below for cleanup goals. Where sample results indicate that concentrations of one or more metals exceed the cleanup goals, DEQ recommends that an additional six inches of surface soil be removed within that space area (referenced by pin flags placed during sampling).

Reporting and documentation

It is recommended that the homeowner retain copies of all results and documentation including:

1. Receipts for disposal of ash and debris.
2. Laboratory report of analytical results.
3. Site map showing sampling locations.
4. Photos or other documentation, as required.
5. Receipts for disposal of contaminated soil.
6. Any other documentation or reports produced.

Counties, insurance, and landfills may require copies of all sampling results and documentation. In order to facilitate future review of cleanup documentation, results of testing and analyses should be outlined in tables for each site compared against the identified screening level and the property location included on a map. Certified reports should include all quality assurance and quality control documentation from the lab.

Completion

Confirmation sampling alone does not qualify a site for a DEQ No Further Action letter, and

DEQ does not certify the safety of a site following debris removal. Representative confirmation soil samples help ensure that most of the hazards associated with ash and debris have been removed from a site. Also, local governments may require property owners to complete confirmation sampling before receiving a building permit. Check with your local county or municipality for additional information.

In the event of a future property transfer or transaction, the buyer or lender may request a DEQ No Further Action letter. DEQ therefore recommends that property owners retain any sampling documentation and receipts for disposal of debris. Information about additional assessment and cleanup beyond the scope described in this fact sheet are [posted online](#).

Fraud alert

Be careful of fraudsters and scam artists. There are reports of people calling and visiting property owners with offers of inspections, unnecessary testing, and questionable ash and debris cleanups. Please remember that government-assisted workers removing hazardous waste and remaining ash and debris will never ask for personal financial information like Social Security or bank account numbers. Only in rare cases, such as needing a gate code or other access information, will cleanup crews reach out to a property owner.

Alternative formats

DEQ can provide documents in an alternate format or in a language other than English upon request. Call DEQ at 800-452-4011 or email deqinfo@deq.state.or.us.

Tables: Soil Testing and Screening Criteria

Initial Health Screening Criteria for Soil		
Metal	Health Screening Level mg/Kg	Cleanup Level
Arsenic	19	Background
Barium	15,000	Health Screen
Cadmium	71	Health Screen
Chromium	120,000	Health Screen
Lead	400	Health Screen
Mercury	23	Health Screen
Selenium	390	Health Screen
Silver	390	Health Screen
Estimated Square Footage of Ash Footprint	Number of Samples	
0 to 100 square feet	1	
101 to 1,000 square feet	2	
1,001 to 1,500 square feet	3	
1,501 to 2,000 square feet	4	
2,001 to 5,000 square feet	5	
Greater than 5,000 square feet	Consult with DEQ	