



Fact Sheet

Protect Surface Waters While Cleaning Up Your Property After a Wildfire

This fact sheet provides homeowners with guidance for protecting water quality during wildfire cleanup by using stormwater management techniques. Ash and debris generated from wildfires can be harmful to our rivers and streams. When rainwater carries sediment and debris from burned areas it also transports pollutants to our surface waters. Many of these pollutants can be toxic to humans and aquatic life.

Cleaning up the ash

When cleaning up ash, be sure to use the appropriate safety measures. Visit the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's [How to Safely Clean Up Ash and Debris From Burned Buildings page](#) for more information about safely cleaning up ash and debris. Never hose ash into streets or storm drains. Instead, direct wash water to vegetated areas or other areas of your yard where the lawn or plants help filter the ash out of the water as it soaks into the ground. Clean out accumulated debris in storm drains and stormwater conveyance ditches on your property to prevent flooding.

Stabilizing your site

Control the perimeter: Place straw wattles, long tubes of straw often available at local hardware stores, around burned structures or vehicles to contain debris and filter runoff. Wattles can also be placed at the top of streambanks or around storm drains on your property. If you don't have access to wattles, you can use fallen branches, small berms like the photo to the right, or [check dams](#) to contain debris.

Preserve existing vegetation: Preserving the existing vegetation on a burned site is typically the best preventative measure for erosion and the least expensive. Vegetation prevents soil from eroding and carrying ash and debris with it. When possible, leave vegetation in place and prevent equipment from driving over it.

Stabilize entry and exit points: Protect areas where vehicles and heavy equipment travel into and off of the property. Use paved access points if they are available, or place gravel on entry and exit points.



Compost berm to stabilize site.

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Install soil stabilization measures: For larger areas of exposed soil, apply a layer of weed-free straw. The straw will reduce the impact of raindrops on soil particles and will prevent erosion. For hillsides and slopes, erosion fabric and wattles are effective for preventing transport of sediment.

Vegetate for long-term stabilization: Reseed areas where it is appropriate, and plant larger shrubs and trees for additional soil stabilization from plant roots.

Manage household hazardous waste: Burned structures can leave behind contaminants. Visit DEQ's [How to Safely Clean Up Ash and Debris From Burned Buildings page](#) for more information about how to manage household hazardous waste in ash and fire debris.



Gravelled site entrance.

For more information

There are partners and resources available assist homeowners after wildfire. The following partners, programs and resources may be especially relevant:

- [DEQ's basin coordinators](#) for questions on water quality impacts.
- Oregon Department of Forestry - [Help after a wildfire](#).
- [County soil and water conservation districts](#), [Oregon State University Extension Service](#) and [local watershed councils](#) can often provide technical assistance and link landowners with funding resources.
- Oregon Department of Emergency Management – [Wildfire Response and Recovery website](#).

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