

## After the Fire: Protect Surface Waters While You Clean Up Your Property

The goal of this fact sheet is to provide 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, such as nitrates and phosphorus, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and heavy metals. 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 [ordeq.org/afterthefire](http://ordeq.org/afterthefire) for more information about how to safely manage ash and debris. Never hose ash into streets or storm drains. Instead, direct washwater to vegetated areas or other areas of your yard where the water can infiltrate 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 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, or check dams to contain debris.



*Compost berm to stabilize site.*

**Preserve existing vegetation:** Preserving the existing vegetation on a burned site is frequently the best preventative measure for erosion - and the least expensive. Vegetation limits the capacity of flowing water to detach soil particles and transport sediment. 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.



*Graveled site entrance.*

**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.

### Managing household hazardous waste

Burnt manmade structures can leave behind toxins like asbestos, heavy metals, sulfates, and nitrates. The State of Oregon is working with federal, state and local partners to safely address ash and debris from the wildfires. Removing fire debris is a two-step cleanup process. Step 1 is clearing properties of household hazardous waste to minimize exposure to the public. Step 2 is removal of ash, debris and burned-out structures.

The process to cleanup household hazardous waste is beginning, and is being provided at no cost to property owners through the county- and state-led process. Removal of household hazardous waste and fire debris is required before property owners can rebuild from the fires. Learn how to sign up for free hazardous waste removal through your county at <http://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.*

**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](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us).