FEMA

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

PARTNERS IN SHAPING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) Fact Sheet: Debris Removal Activities

Environmental resources, cultural institutions, and historic assets define communities and contribute to their well-being and unique character. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays a critical role in helping communities incorporate environmental stewardship and historic preservation into emergency management decisions. As disasters continue to challenge our nation and communities grapple with issues of preparedness and sustainability, FEMA offers expertise to ensure both legal compliance and informed local, State, Tribal, and national planning.

Debris Removal and EHP Review

FEMA's Public Assistance program awards funds to eligible applicants for debris clearance, removal, and disposal operations. Examples are debris removal from public right-of-ways to allow the safe passage of emergency vehicles and from public property to eliminate health and safety hazards. In some instances, it includes collection of private property debris placed at the curb. This fact sheet does not apply to the demolition of privately owned structures. Although FEMA's statutory exclusions under Section 316 of the Stafford Act exempt most debris removal actions from review by the National Environmental Policy Act, compliance with other laws—such as the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Air Act, and Clean Water Act—is still required.

Considering EHP Impacts

FEMA's team of EHP experts reviews all debris removal projects to assure that debris removal and disposal complies with environmental laws and regulations. When planning and conducting debris operations, applicants should identify potential sites for temporary debris storage, reduction, and final disposal that take into consideration environmental resources and avoid impacts on floodplains, wetlands, endangered species' critical habitats, and archaeologically sensitive areas, including maritime or underwater archaeological resources if waterways are impacted. Debris must be staged a safe distance from property boundaries, surface water, wetlands, structures, wells, and septic tanks with leach fields. Communities may contact their State environmental protection agency for guidance on site selection. Upon completion of debris removal and disposal, site remediation may be necessary at staging and other areas of impact.

EHP Considerations for Debris Removal

When planning and implementing debris removal operations, FEMA advises States and communities to:

- Avoid archaeological sites and historic buildings.
- Avoid sensitive areas such as wetlands, floodplains, critical habitats for protected species, rare ecosystems, contaminated sites, public water supplies, well fields, or surface waters. If near these areas, establish buffer and/or turbidity barriers.
- Consider potentially negative impacts to schools, nursing homes, hospitals, residences, etc.
- Consider prevailing winds for dust and odors, and evaluate and implement site remediation requirements at staging areas.

Completing EHP Review

Applicants play a critical role in streamlining EHP review by identifying and resolving potential environmental compliance issues early in the debris removal process and providing information necessary for EHP review. A critical emergency activity that takes place in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, debris removal generally occurs in advance of project review. However, EHP review must be completed before all funding is obligated to ensure that debris removal was carried out in compliance with environmental laws and regulations. Applicants must include information on temporary staging and reduction sites, as well as final disposal sites (e.g., permitted landfill, recycling center, etc.). FEMA encourages States and local communities to develop Debris Management Plans that will provide clear guidance on site selection and processing requirements, as well as establish procedures for quickly acquiring permits in the event of a disaster.

Debris Removal Activities: EHP Checklist

The checklist below describes project information that FEMA requires in order to complete EHP review of a debris removal project.

☑	**Location**	State the location of temporary staging or reduction sites and final disposal sites. Include site addresses and latitude/longitude in decimal degrees (e.g., 38.5342° N, -77.0212° W). Identify flood hazard areas, wetlands, and other sensitive areas that should be avoided.
☑	**Description of Project Scope of Work**	Provide a detailed description of the project scope of work, including potential debris types, such as vegetative, construction and demolition (C&D), white goods, or hazardous waste, etc., as well as debris quantities and waste disposal methods (e.g., incineration, chipping, recycling).
☑	**Permits**	Provide appropriate Federal, State, and local permits, including operating permits for temporary staging sites and final disposal sites. Permits are required in certain States for the burning of vegetative debris, and, in some cases, a letter of approval or permit may be required from more than one State agency. Applicants may also need to secure a State permit for the disposal of residual ash. Check with the State environmental protection agency to determine which permits are needed.
☑	**Photographs and Site Information**	Provide floodplain and wetland maps showing temporary staging and/or reduction sites and final disposal site locations in relation to these resources. Include aerial imagery of the sites.
☑	**Agency Coordination**	Note any communications with resource agencies, such as the State Historic Preservation Officer, Environmental Protection Agency, State Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and provide copies of correspondence and permits.
☑	**Additional Information**	Include a Debris Management Plan, if one exists. Also include copies of other available relevant information, such as traffic studies, air quality reports, environmental site assessments and remediation reports, historic property surveys, or archaeological surveys.

Timeframes for EHP Review

Timeframes for EHP review vary depending on a project's potential to impact environmental and historic resources and the complexity of the effort. Review generally takes 30 days after FEMA has received a complete project application with supporting documentation. However, some projects may require consultation with resource agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State and/or Tribal Historic Preservation Office(s), which may extend the review period as it involves coordination with other agencies. Applicants can work with their FEMA Regional EHP contact to obtain more details on documentation requirements and best practices for expediting the review process.

EHP Best Practice: Connecticut Debris Removal Following Hurricane Irene

In August 2011, Hurricane Irene struck the State of Connecticut with 70 mile per hour winds and heavy rains. The State turned to its State Disaster Debris Management Plan developed in 2008 as an annex to the State Natural Disaster Plan. In addition, the State produced a website on debris management and disaster preparedness that provided fact sheets on debris management operations and guidance on environmental compliance and permitting requirements. These tools helped ensure that applicants secured permits and other information needed for quick and efficient EHP review.

Additional Resources: For more information on EHP review and FEMA grant assistance, contact your State Emergency Management Agency or Tribal office or visit http://www.fema.gov/environmental-planning-and historic-preservation-program.