

Q&A: Public Assistance Debris Removal

Release Date: Dec 10, 2024

Release Number: FS 026

Assistance for Helene debris removal from private property in North Carolina may be made available through FEMA's Public Assistance Program.

What is FEMA doing to expedite debris removal?

FEMA has determined that Private Property Debris Removal (PPDR) and Commercial Property Debris Removal (CPDR) are in the public interest and has waived several requirements in the following counties: Alleghany, Alexander, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Policy waivers include:

- **Private Road Debris:** For debris clearance on private roads, FEMA will include removal and disposal during the initial pass as necessary to ensure emergency access on public and private roads. FEMA will also allow an initial pass for debris removal of commercial and private property debris placed on the Right of Way (ROW) for private roads, including in gated communities. One completed Right of Entry form will be required for each gated community. The work is still required to be performed by an eligible applicant.
- **Commercial ROW Debris:** FEMA approved one pass to remove incident-related commercial debris placed on the public ROW. Once the initial pass is completed, commercial debris cannot be co-mingled with other eligible debris placed on the public or private ROW. Additional passes may be authorized by the federal coordinating officer based on extraordinary circumstances.
- **Hand-Loaded Trucks:** FEMA has approved vegetative debris in hand-loaded trucks and trailers, including trucks without solid tailgates and may fund up to a maximum of 90% of certified capacity.
- **Vehicles and Vessels:** Abandoned vehicles or vessels may be removed to clear the ROW.
- **Slabs and Foundations:** Failure to remove slabs and foundations during demolition may threaten the economic recovery of the community. Therefore, removal of slabs and foundations (from residential and limited commercial



structures) as demolition debris may be eligible.

Why is Right of Way (ROW) debris removal a priority?

Typically, the ROW is a piece of land immediately adjacent to a roadway, electric transmission lines and oil and gas pipelines. The ROW is reserved for potential maintenance or for future expansion needs. Clearing and opening ROW routes can support reconstruction of homes/facilities and often allows survivors to simply return home.

What should residents do with debris on their property?

If possible, residents should push debris generated by Tropical Storm Helene into the Right of Way to help crews get as much debris picked up as they can ahead of winter weather. Residents who need additional help moving debris should call their local emergency management office for potential help from voluntary organizations.

Will FEMA reimburse for debris removal from waterways?

Debris from waterways that is necessary to eliminate an immediate threat to life, public health and safety or improved property may be eligible for removal. Removal of debris in a waterway that does not meet this criterion is ineligible, even if the debris is deposited by the incident. City or county officials will work with North Carolina Emergency Management to facilitate discussions with FEMA and state staff to discuss possible removal.

Can FEMA help with the procurement process?

Yes. FEMA's Procurement Disaster Assistance Team is deployed in North Carolina to assist local city and county officials and North Carolina Emergency Management to help Public Assistance applicants. FEMA also provides regular trainings. For a list of upcoming trainings, visit [Procurement Under Grants Training | FEMA.gov](#).

Do counties need to follow the state and federal procurement process if they do not use the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)?

Yes. Counties must still follow state and federal procurement requirements.



Can local emergency managers request assistance from USACE for debris removal that is in the ROW of private roads or gated communities?

Yes. Local governments should let the state and FEMA know about these private roads and gated communities so that we can identify them and share them with USACE.

Is debris removal from a public park reimbursable?

If the public park has improved facilities, such as bathrooms, huts or benches, debris removal would likely be reimbursable to restore the facility to its primary purpose. We encourage applicants to reach out to their state program delivery managers. They can assist FEMA with determining whether the removal is reimbursable.

Is the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) still conducting any debris collection?

Yes, NCDOT continues to conduct ROW debris collection activities and will file as an applicant to FEMA for this work. Questions regarding state debris removal work should be directed to the state.

Debris Removal by USACE

What debris operations support is USACE conducting?

FEMA has tasked USACE to provide:

- Technical assistance and monitoring to assist counties that opt to conduct their own debris operations.
- Assistance for debris removal from the public Rights of Way.
- Assistance for waterway debris that poses immediate threat to life, safety, health and improved infrastructure.
- Assistance for private and commercial property debris removal.

How much will the state/counties/cities have to pay for USACE to do the ROW, waterway and PPDR/CPDR work?



Traditionally, the cost share is 75% to federal and 25% non federal. For this disaster, the cost will be 100% to federal for the first 180 days. Any changes to the timeframe will be determined by FEMA.

Where are USACE and its contractor(s) currently working debris operations?

USACE is working ROW debris removal in Buncombe, McDowell, Polk and Rutherford counties, and the cities of Asheville, Lake Lure and Chimney Rock. Waterway debris removal is occurring at Lake Lure in Rutherford County. USACE is preparing for ROW debris removal in Allegheny, Gaston, Transylvania and Macon counties.

What types of storm-generated debris is USACE authorized to pick up from the ROW?

USACE is authorized to pick up debris within the public ROW, which may be 10-15 feet from the edge of the road. It is acknowledged that on some secondary/tertiary roads, the ROW may narrow and be less than 15 feet.

Debris types include:

- vegetative/woody debris.
- construction and demolition.
- white goods.
- household hazardous waste.)

Roadway (asphalt/concrete) and bridge structural material debris is addressed on a case-by-case basis. USACE will coordinate with FEMA for review and final determination.

FEMA is authorizing the collection of sand, mud, silt and gravel in the areas approved for debris removal.

FEMA has also approved the removal of black bags that contain construction and demolition or vegetative debris. Black bags are usually picked up by county or city officials.



USACE is authorized to remove vehicles, vessels and other potential titled property from the ROW for the purpose of removing them as impediments to/from the ROW operations. Titled property will be taken to a special staging ground where local authorities will conduct VIN verification. Once staged, local authorities will work with owners on the final disposition of the property.

Do I need to separate/sort the types of debris at the ROW?

Residents should separate/sort the debris types to the greatest extent possible as this will enable debris removal contractors to work more efficiently.

Who prioritizes where the debris removal will begin?

The schedule of removal is identified by localities. They should share this information with residents so that eligible storm debris is brought to the ROW in a timely manner.

Do I need to contact USACE to coordinate for ROW debris pickup? How are communities notified that work will begin along their ROWs? How much notice is given?

No contact is required. USACE will conduct pickup throughout the localities that have requested work. Site conditions, varying debris quantities and weather may result in a shift in operations. Localities are responsible for providing notice to residents. Close coordination is important to provide communities with sufficient time to move debris to the ROW.

Will USACE pick up regular household trash as well?

No. Daily household trash will continue to be collected by the localities based on their established schedules.

Are there any volunteers who can help me bring debris to the ROW?

Residents should contact their locality to discuss what assistance may be available.

Is the USACE contractor allowed to pick up debris located behind guardrails in ROW?



Yes, USACE and its contractor will work within the ROW. Landscapes may vary and features such as guardrails, hydrants, mailboxes, stormwater drains will be present within the ROWs.

How many passes will USACE conduct to collect ROW debris?

The goal is to get as much debris as possible during the first pass. That said, we know that people continue to clean up, or are just returning to their properties, and thus more debris will be brought to the ROW. USACE will work with localities to identify the need for additional passes as well as identify the final pass. The localities will have the lead to notify their citizens.

Will the USACE contractor regrade the ROWs to pre-event conditions?

No. USACE will not backfill or regrade the ROWs.

Will the USACE contractor use any local companies/manpower to assist with the debris removal?

USACE's primary contractor will have a significant portion of its workforce as local hires.

Is a debris management site (DMS) permanent?

A TDMS is a temporary location used for handling/processing debris. All debris will be removed for final disposal and the TDMS will be returned to its original condition.

Where will the debris go for final disposal?

USACE will reduce and recycle to the greatest extent possible, but there will be material that will need to be sent to a landfill. USACE is aware that all counties may not have landfills or may not have available capacity. USACE and its contractor will identify final disposal options.

