

Dealing with Tree and Vegetative Disaster Debris



Tree and vegetative debris can be a major problem following a heavy wind event, such as a hurricane or tornado. While navigating state and federal (e.g., FEMA) requirements can be complicated, here are a few tips to help your community expedite removal and maximize your reimbursement.

What's the plan?

Having a pre-established storm debris management plan and outreach elements can pave a smoother road to recovery. Plans may consider who will be removing debris, how it will be disposed of, who is responsible for recording data for reimbursement, and other logistical hurdles. Consider what audiences you need to engage during the recovery and how your community will most effectively do that. For more resources, visit www.h-gac.com/solid-waste-management/disaster-debris-cleanup-and-management.

Should you use a debris hauler?

Consider using a trusted and experienced debris hauler who is experienced in meeting all FEMA reimbursement requirements and will make sure that all rules are followed, including proper documentation. When hiring a debris hauler, make sure that you follow all procurement requirements required by FEMA.

When does FEMA reimburse communities for tree debris?

Even if will be working with a debris hauler it is still important to understand the basics of reimbursement. FEMA reimburses communities for the removal of tree debris when the hazardous limb, tree, or stump poses an immediate threat to the public or when the debris is placed at the curb of a residence.

Eligible situations include when:

- Removal is in the public interest;
- Removal eliminates an immediate threat to lives, public health, and safety;
- Debris is the result of the declared event; and
- Debris is placed at the curb of a residence.

Ineligible tree debris removal includes:

- Hazards that existed prior to the event;
- Hazards in a natural area that don't impact public-use areas such as trails, playgrounds, or sidewalks; and
- Debris on private property, not placed at the curb, unless it meets the first three criteria for eligible debris removal.

Dealing with Tree and Vegetative Disaster Debris



When is debris removal from a waterway eligible for FEMA reimbursement?

In **navigable** waterways when:

- The community has legal responsibility for the waterway;
- The debris is causing an immediate threat to lives, public health, and safety;
- The debris is a result of the incident and not pre-existing;
- The debris obstructs the passage of vessels to a maximum depth of 2 feet below the low-tide draft of the largest vessel that utilized the waterway prior to the incident; and
- The tree is still rooted to an embankment and is floating or submerged, the cost to cut the tree at the water's edge is eligible.

In **non-navigable** waterways (natural waterways or a constructed channel, including flood control works):

- The debris obstructs, or could obstruct, intake structures;
- The debris could cause damage to structures, such as bridges and culverts; and
- The debris is causing, or could cause, flooding to improved public or private property during the occurrence of a 5-year flood.



Resources available online

- [Texas Gulf Coast Regional – Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster](#)
- [H-GAC Resources, Publications and Presentations from Past Workshops](#)
- [FEMA Procurement Disaster Assistance Team \(PDAT\) Field Manual](#)
- [FEMA Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide](#)
- [FEMA Fact Sheet – Public Assistance: Category A – Debris Removal including Private Property Debris](#)
- [TCEQ Regulatory Guidance – Managing Debris from Declared Disasters](#)



For more information on dealing with storm debris, visit www.h-gac.com/solid-waste-management/disaster-debris-cleanup-and-management, or email swinformation@h-gac.com.