

Guidance for Disposal of Fire-Affected Debris

Introduction

This document is intended for individual leaseholders or property owners managing a site that has been impacted by fire. This guidance document provides directions on the proper disposal of fire-affected debris at an authorized landfill or transfer station. The Ministry of Environment may consider alternative methods of disposal; however, requests for consideration must be submitted in writing to the ministry for acceptance prior to commencing work. Further guidance on alternative methods may be available at large-scale/emergency events.

Wildfire can pose significant environmental, health and safety hazards for affected communities, and people, if water sources, roadways, property or recreational areas are impacted. Leaseholders or property owners whose cabin, structure and/or belongings suffered damage due to wildfire have the responsibility of cleaning up the site and disposing of wildfire-affected debris following the wildfire event. Prolonging disposal could result in increased impacts on the property. Fire-affected debris not cleaned up may pose a safety risk from unstable structure(s), open excavations like water wells, and increased health risks from rodents and large animals attracted to food waste. Wind-blown debris and runoff from the site can also pose a risk to the environment. Materials not affected by wildfire should be separated as much as possible. It is a violation to dispose of debris and waste in water or on land at a location that is not approved by the ministry.

Safety in fire-affected areas

Before proceeding with any work, conduct a site safety assessment to identify all potential hazards and put a plan in place to mitigate the hazards. Qualified contractors may be required to deal with hazards around isolating electrical or natural gas services, dealing with hazardous material or physical hazards like unstable structures or large trees damaged by the fire. Where necessary, use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is suitable for the task being performed. Consult an expert or hire a qualified contractor if you are unsure about the hazards that may exist at a site. The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency has several resources to support the response and recovery following emergencies (saskpublicsafety.ca). The Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety also has resources to support worker safety (saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/ministries/labour-relations-and-workplace-safety).

Managing fire-affected areas

1. Assess and characterize the waste

Before beginning clean-up activities, assess the different waste types that may be present within impacted homes and structures. Here are a few considerations:

- **Hazardous waste** – Hazardous materials include anything toxic, flammable, corrosive or reactive/explosive. For example, chemicals, pesticides, propane tanks and used oil. Determine where within the structures these materials were likely stored, such as in a garage or shed.
- **Fire-affected waste** – Materials exposed to fire and smoke are considered impacted materials.
- **Waste not impacted by fire** – Materials not exposed to fire and smoke. For example, domestic waste from clean-up crews or waste generated from clearing or demolition.
- **Environmental and safety considerations:**
 - **Asbestos** is a naturally occurring mineral commonly used in construction insulation. When structures containing asbestos burn, microscopic asbestos fibres are released into the air, posing significant environmental and health risks.
 - **Ash** from wildfires can contain hazardous materials such as heavy metals, asbestos and hydrocarbons.
 - **Organic** materials, including contaminated soils, treated or spoiled grains, compost, biowaste, dead animals and carcasses may pose health concerns.

2. Site clean up

Once the assessment of the property has been completed, the site may be cleaned up. Ensure safe work procedures are in place to protect those involved in cleanup activities.

- If asbestos may be present in fire-impacted debris and/or ash, consult a qualified professional for testing considerations and see Section 3 for disposal requirements.
- Each type of material (hazardous materials, inert materials, etc.) may require its own handling and disposal method.
- Ash will need to be cleaned up to the greatest extent possible, following health and safety guidelines.
- Removing ash and the top six inches of fire-affected soil usually eliminates most contaminants. However, in areas where hazardous substances like fuel were burned or spilled, testing may be needed to ensure contaminants are fully removed, as six inches of soil removal might not be enough.
- Not all landfills are approved to accept ash or fire-affected soil. Prior to removing for disposal, contact the operator of the landfill to determine acceptance criteria and sampling requirements.
- Dampening ash and other debris with water can help protect human health and prevent the spread of contaminated materials.
- Make sure all waste loads are securely covered during transport to the disposal site.

3. Waste Disposal

All waste must be disposed of at a landfill with a valid Permit to Operate or stored prior to disposal at a transfer station that has received Acceptance of Notification pursuant to the Transfer Station Chapter of The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2010. Segregation of waste to prevent further contamination of other waste will minimize disposal volumes.

Visit the Saskatchewan Interactive Mapping at [Sask Interactive Mapping - Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment](#) or the Saskatchewan Waste Reduction website at [saskwastereduction.ca](#) to find a location near you. Please check with the operator of the landfill or transfer station for what materials are accepted before starting cleanup operations and prior to hauling any materials for disposal.

- **Hazardous waste** – All hazardous debris must be disposed of at an authorized landfill or transfer station that also has an Approval to Store Hazardous Substances and Waste Dangerous Goods (HSWDG). Hazardous materials shall be separated from non-hazardous materials as much as possible and transported to an authorized facility.
- **Fire-affected waste** – Fire-affected waste must be disposed of at an authorized landfill with ministry approval to accept the materials.
- **Waste not impacted by fire** – General waste may be managed in various ways depending on the type.
- **Domestic waste** may be disposed of at a landfill or in transfer station bins for final disposal at an authorized landfill.
- **Recyclable materials** may be held at a transfer station or landfill for transport to a recycling facility (e.g. metals, beverage containers, plastics).
- **Construction and demolition waste** (e.g. clean wood, concrete, metals) may be handled through reuse or disposal as appropriate. The Construction and Demolition Waste Management and Disposal guidance provides several options for the management of this waste type.
- **Asbestos** – If fire-affected asbestos is to be removed and disposed of at a landfill or transfer station, consult a qualified professional, wear appropriate PPE, and ensure all asbestos is double-bagged and labelled before transporting.
- **Ash** – Ash will need to be disposed of following the landfill acceptance criteria. Sampling and characterization of the ash or soil may be required; check with the authorized landfill for sampling requirements.
- **Organic** – Each type of material will require its own handling and disposal method.

Other considerations

- Leaseholders/owners are strongly encouraged to maintain documentation regarding waste disposal to indicate that cleanup debris has been disposed of appropriately. Proof is typically in the form of receipts from a disposal company, contractor or landfill fees.
- Burning of waste materials or fire debris is prohibited under The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2010 unless authorized in a permit.

- If access to the landfill is temporarily unavailable due to fire conditions, the local municipal authority must provide alternate arrangements for waste disposal services. Municipalities should consult with the Ministry of Environment to obtain a temporary permit and/or lease for a municipal solid waste transfer station if other disposal options are not available.

Additional information

Additional information can be found on the [Government of Saskatchewan solid waste management website](#), the [Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council](#) and [saskpublicsafety.ca](#).

Other related guidance documents:

- [Construction and Demolition Waste Management and Disposal](#)
- [Policy on the Disposal of Friable Waste Asbestos](#)
- [Saskatchewan Interactive Mapping Application Guidance](#)

If you have questions not covered in this document or have unique disposal challenges, please contact the Ministry of Environment's Public Inquiry Centre at 1-800-567-4224 or centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca.

For more information regarding your Crown land disposition, please contact one of the following regional offices, providing the disposition or polygon number: landsnorth@gov.sk.ca or landscentral@gov.sk.ca or landssouth@gov.sk.ca.

Information presented in this guidance document should not be considered legal advice.