

FAQ: Debris removal activities occurring across Western Carolina

1. What debris removal activities are occurring across Western North Carolina due to Tropical Storm Helene?

Debris removal activities are being implemented by the state of North Carolina, federal partners and local city and county officials. Debris removal is being conducted on public right of ways, private property and waterway locations.

Additional debris operations including commercial property debris removal and demolition of hazardous structures are also happening. Those operations are only happening where debris would create a threat to health, life, and safety; these are more limited in scope and geographical impact.

2. How is FEMA eligibility determined for debris removal, and who makes those final decisions?

- For debris to be eligible for federal reimbursement, it must be a threat to health, life, safety, or removal will alleviate an immediate threat to improved public or private property.
 - Immediate threat is the threat of additional damage or destruction from an incident that can reasonably be expected to occur within 5 years of the declared incident. For example, if debris is creating a situation where there is an increased risk of flooding, that debris may be eligible for removal.
- Eligibility decisions are made in partnership between FEMA and the state of North Carolina.

3. How does FEMA and the state of North Carolina mitigate the impact to waterway systems when debris removal is occurring in streams, rivers, or other water systems across the state?

- Debris removal from waterways is only eligible at locations where a specific threat to infrastructure, health, life, safety, or there is an identified increased risk of flooding.

Debris removal teams are educated, trained and informed that when performing physical debris removal, efforts must be made to reduce environmental risk using measures such as installing timber mats on streambanks for heavy equipment, limiting equipment use in waterways wherever possible, and to restore the site to pre-disaster condition by replacing sod, grass or materials that may have been affected by equipment. Where there may be a risk of limited environmental impact, such as damage to streambanks or native species habitat. FEMA and the state must balance the threat of this risk compared to the need to determine eligible debris removal to alleviate threats to health, life, safety or to alleviate flood hazards.

- FEMA, state, and federal partners rely on available information related to archaeological and historical impacts, such as culturally sensitive tribal grounds, endangered species, sensitive habit areas to avoid or mitigate impacts to these areas.



4. How can the public at large find information on locations of debris removal operations?

- FEMA, the state and federal partners are engaged with local city or county governments for approval of debris removal locations, and geographic maps are provided (based on locations identified by the eligible governmental applicant), to local officials for planning and tracking purposes of the debris mission(s).

5. What is the timeline for debris removal operations?

- The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers identified June 15, 2025 as the goal to complete waterway debris removal operations, and June 30, 2025 as the goal to complete the private property missions. These dates are specific to the federal debris removal contractors. State or other local operations may continue.
- North Carolina has a similar debris mission directed by state resources. They are partnering directly with jurisdictions and are developing a timeline of completion.

6. If private citizens have concerns about debris removal locations, or areas of hazardous debris, how can they provide that information to FEMA or the state?

- Residents should provide that information to their local city or county officials. As example, a resident living in Buncombe County with concerns about waterway debris impacts, can provide their information and concerns to the county emergency management office, or to the county office of solid waste.

7. If there is eligible waterway debris, such as on a streambank, that a private landowner does not want debris removed, how can they indicate that fact?

- Property owners have direct contact with debris contractors. Debris teams are trained on these efforts and may instruct the property owners to mark the debris with an indicator like a small red flag, so they know not to remove the items.

Should you have additional questions on debris removal efforts, please contact the state of North Carolina debris management at debris@ncdps.gov, FEMA debris at fema-dr4827-nc-debris@fema.dhs.gov, or your respective city or county government.

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