

News

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Health Officer Order Prohibits Removal of Fire Debris from Burn Sites Pending Development of State and Federal Process

San Mateo County Health Officer Dr. Scott Morrow has issued a health order prohibiting the unsafe removal, transport, and disposal of fire debris and other hazardous materials from structures burned during the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires without written permission from Environmental Health Services.

The order also provides guidance and safety measures for residents returning to their homes and properties damaged in the fires.

With measures to protect the health of residents and safeguard the environment, the order cites the toxicity of household waste and other debris from burn sites: “exposure to hazardous substances may lead to acute and chronic health effects and may cause long-term public health and environmental impacts, and uncontrolled hazardous materials and debris pose significant threats to public health through inhalation of dust particles and contamination of drinking water supplies.”

San Mateo County is working with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to remove household hazardous waste from burn areas and to develop a process for the removal and transport of fire debris to an approved location for disposal.

“We are working to make sure that homeowners will have safe options for disposal of debris, while protecting their health and safeguarding the environment,” said Heather Forshey, director of Environmental Health Services. “We are working with the State to clarify debris removal roles and expect to provide guidance to residents soon.”

Residents should not attempt to transport burn debris, ash, or any household hazardous waste to landfills or transfer stations. They cannot accept these materials.

For residents returning to burn sites, the order requires covering clothing, gloves, eye protection, and NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirators, such as N-95 or P-100 masks, consistent with guidelines from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The full text of the order is here:

<https://www.smchealth.org/health-officer-updates/order-health-officer-prohibiting-unsafe-removal-transport-and-disposal-fire>

Residents with questions about household hazardous waste and debris removal should contact Environmental Health Services at (650) 372-6200 or envhealth@smcgov.org. For other information, go to <https://www.smcgov.org/smc-wildfire-recovery>

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