



After Butte Fire Devastation, DTSC a Part of Rebuilding

California's devastating wildfires left thousands of structures destroyed last summer in rural communities throughout the state. The fires also left behind tens of thousands of pounds hazardous materials which pose a serious threat to people and the environment.

Soon after the fires struck, the [Department of Toxic Substances Control](#) (DTSC) along with CalRecycle, as well as many federal and local agencies swiftly moved into the burned out areas to help communities remove of hazardous waste left behind so those communities could begin to rebuild.

Since September, DTSC's Emergency Response Unit has been part of the cleanup group assessing and removing hazardous waste left behind by the Butte Fire in Calaveras County.

"DTSC, CalRecycle, federal and local agencies have been collaborating for more than two months to assess and remove the potential dangers from the hazardous waste," said Adam Palmer, supervisor of the Emergency Response Unit. "We have been working non-stop to remove the hazardous waste as quickly as possible so that people can return to their properties and rebuild their lives."

DTSC's primary focus is to evaluate and remove hazardous waste debris which ranges from asbestos siding or pipe insulation, to paint, batteries, flammable liquids, and cylinders. The hazardous waste must be removed and properly disposed of at a waste facility to prevent further exposure to the public and the environment.

The Butte Fire, which burned more than 70,000 acres, destroyed more than 800 residential properties and buildings. Although nearly all the properties have been assessed, the cleanup isn't complete.

DTSC will continue for the next four months to assist CalRecycle with the removal of [CONTINUED >](#)



Potential hazardous waste such as these containers (left) and these batteries (above) were evaluated and removed.



Butte Fire

hazardous waste discovered during debris removal operations.

In addition to working with CalRecycle, DTSC also has been working closely with Calaveras County during the cleanup and county officials said they appreciated the support they have received from the state agencies.

“This was a collaborative effort with all the state agencies and it’s important that people understand that this type of assistance is needed when natural disasters like this happen,” said Jason Boetzer, Calaveras County Health Director. “DTSC’s staff was very empathetic to the people who lost everything they owned and to Calaveras County workers.”

DTSC has also been assessing properties damaged by the Valley Fire which destroyed almost 2,000 structures in Lake County in September. DTSC also assessed and removed hazardous waste from commercial properties including tire shops, automotive businesses and apartment complexes.

More than 70,000 thousand pounds of hazardous waste has been removed from the areas hit by the Butte and Valley fires with thousands more still to be removed. And, with the strong possibility of El Niño-driven rains this winter, the removal of the hazardous waste has been critical.

“We wanted to remove the hazardous waste as quickly as possible before there is any possibility of it entering rivers or the drinking water supply,” Palmer said.

Also during the summer, DTSC assisted with the cleanup following the Rocky fire which burned in Lake, Yolo and Colusa counties, and the multiple wildfires in Trinity County that burned in August.



Top: A technician sifts through debris beneath a symbol of the communities resiliency.



Above: Agencies are working non-stop so that residents can begin rebuilding as soon as possible.

EMERGENCY GUIDANCE ON WILDFIRES FACT SHEETS

- [Handling Ash, Debris and other Hazardous Materials from Burned Structures](#)
- [Management Options for Expedited Collection of Hazardous Wastes from Burned Areas](#)