

Clearing Debris from Land

You are responsible for clearing debris from your own property. It requires a plan that addresses priorities, removal techniques and safety issues.

Determine Priorities

After a severe storm, priorities for clearing debris from land should be determined by the following:

- ◆ Land use and value — Clear streets and roads to allow emergency vehicles to pass freely. In pastures, remove any lumber containing nails or other pieces of metal that could injure livestock.
- ◆ Available equipment — You can use power saws, tractors, bulldozers, and trucks to move fallen trees. If you have access only to small equipment, remove tree roots and small limbs before attempting to clear the area.
- ◆ Type of debris — Different vegetation requires different clean-up and salvage procedures. In woodlots and forests, experienced foresters should designate salvageable timber. You may need specialized equipment to clear large areas efficiently.

Remove Debris

You can choose from various methods to remove tree debris:

Bulldozing

- ◆ Contact an Extension horticulturist or forestry specialist to inspect damaged trees to see if they can be salvaged.
- ◆ Remove valuable trees before clearing debris.
- ◆ If possible, attach a rake to the front of the bulldozer. This enables most of the soil to pass through the teeth, eliminating undesirable mounds of soil.
- ◆ Remove the stumps. If you use a bulldozer, leave stumps 6 to 10 feet high for leverage. If you use a stump grinder, remove the trees at ground level.

Burial

- ◆ Tree debris can be buried, but the cost is high.
- ◆ Use a chipping machine to eliminate smaller branches and reduce the amount of burial space needed.

Landfill

- ◆ You can place tree debris in erosion gullies (where the land is not practical for terracing) or in swamps or low-lying areas.
- ◆ Consult a water resource specialist to determine how the landfill will alter the water's path. You will need a bulldozer or other large equipment for this work.

- ◆ It is dangerous to use a tractor to push debris into gullies.

Burning

- ◆ Let trees dry until the foliage begins to fall.
- ◆ Put debris in large, compact piles and cover with fuel oil.
- ◆ Stoke piles, keeping the fire alive until all woody material is burned.
- ◆ In some areas you may need a permit to burn debris. For example, some communities may prohibit burning because of smoke pollution.

Safety

If you are unaccustomed to working with damaged or fallen timber, observing safety precautions like the following may prevent injury or death:

- ◆ Stabilize ladders when pruning trees, or climb into trees to prune. Use a safety rope.

- ◆ Watch for falling limbs.
- ◆ Be careful of electric power lines. Leave extensive pruning around power lines to power companies. Wet limbs or soil-soaked control ropes on pruning equipment can be hazardous. Do not use pruning equipment with metal handles.
- ◆ Handle chain saws safely. Use a sharp saw. Shut off the motor, even when you are moving only a few feet. Remember that you can't shout or hear warnings when the saw is running.
- ◆ Clear the area before beginning to saw limbs or trees. Determine the direction the tree will fall. Do not allow trees to fall into other tree branches. Plan an escape route in case the tree jumps off the stump when it is cut.

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