

## Public Health Fact Sheet

### Waste Disposal After a Disaster

#### Introduction:

After a disaster, your usual waste collection service may be disrupted for a period of time. In addition, there will be an excess of debris and other waste materials such as contaminated or spoiled food or hazardous substances that will need to be disposed of. Your Local Government will have a plan in place for dealing with the waste from a disaster. It must be remembered that there are specific guidelines in place to deal with certain types of waste and it is important that these are adhered to despite the disaster situation. These measures have been developed to help protect you and the environment you live in.

#### Public Health Significance:

Disasters generate enormous volumes of waste. These range from construction and demolition waste to organic waste from decomposing vegetation and foods. Inappropriate waste disposal and the additional burdens placed on local waste management facilities can result in sanitation and odour problems and the proliferation of vermin. Ensuring that debris and other materials such as foods, dead animals and chemicals are disposed of appropriately after a disaster, helps to minimize the risk of illness and injury and restore a sense of well-being. It also assists the agencies who are working to restore community services.

#### Action to Take:

Be on the alert of information about debris disposal services and schedules. If you have the means by which to remove your own debris, check with local authorities first to ascertain the status of the waste transfer station or landfill and its accessibility to the public.

You can help to minimise the impact of disaster debris and waste by considering the following:

- Safe disposal of unsafe food – If your waste collection service is still operational, wrap the food securely in a plastic bag, foil or newspaper and place it in a secure container. Do not leave food in plastic garbage bags outside. This will attract animals and could pose a health risk. If the collection service is not in operation and unlikely to be restored for some time, you should bury spoiled food. Care should be taken to ensure that it is not buried close to a water body or a place where it is likely to be disturbed. It should be buried at least 1m deep to ensure that animals do not detect it and dig it up. Foods that are stored in plastic should be unwrapped to promote a more rapid decomposition.
- Some solid waste may be recyclable or must be disposed of at your local waste management station in designated ways. Try to keep your solid waste separated at the curb-side for easier collection according to categories. For example, separate green waste from building debris.

**For further information, please contact your nearest Environmental Health Service office:**

<b>Brisbane North</b> -	PH: 3624 1111	<b>Brisbane South</b> -	PH: 3000 9148	<b>Cairns</b> -	PH: 4050 3601
<b>Redcliffe</b> -	PH: 3897 6480	<b>Gold Coast</b> -	PH: 5509 7222	<b>Townsville</b> -	PH: 4753 9000
<b>Sunshine Coast</b> -	PH 5409 6600	<b>Toowoomba</b> -	PH: 4631 9888	<b>Mt Isa</b> -	PH: 4744 4859
<b>Bundaberg</b> -	PH: 4150 2780	<b>West Moreton</b> -	PH: 3810 1500	<b>Mackay</b> -	PH: 4968 6611
<b>Rockhampton</b> -	PH: 4920 6989	<b>Hervey Bay</b> -	PH: 4120 6000		
<b>Longreach</b> -	PH: 4658 0859	<b>Charleville</b> -	PH: 4656 8100		

- Don't leave hazardous waste such as chemicals, gas tanks and asbestos on the curb-side. Secure these in a safe location until such time as you are advised of disposal methods.
- Avoid trip hazards and obstructions. Cut tree branches into manageable sections that are easier to stack and less likely to protrude over walkways and roads.
- Place smaller items into garbage bags or other containers that are easily handled. Ensure that the containers are weather-proof. Cardboard boxes and paper bags deteriorate in the rain.
- Do not dispose of your debris in vacant lots or public places. There are penalties for unlawful dumping of rubbish and it attracts vermin and creates a nuisance for others.
- Do not burn waste or debris unless there has been special authorisation by the appropriate agencies.
- Consider starting a compost bin. This is an environmentally friendly way of disposing of organic waste which can later be utilised in gardens.
- Remember that there will be a high demand on building materials in the months ahead. You can save money and ease the demand on resources by reusing or recycling. If setting aside some of this "debris" for future use, ensure that it is stored in such a way that it does not harbour vermin or becomes a hazard.

**Acknowledgement:**

Information for this document was sourced from the RedR Organisation website - <http://www.redr.org/WMinE/index.htm> and The Texas A&M University System.

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