



RESOURCE GUIDE

Removing Dead and Fire-Weakened Trees After a Fire

Depending on the severity of a fire, the impacts on the trees and landscape will differ. After a more severe burn, dead and fire-weakened trees often become a safety concern, especially in areas of higher structure and population density, and must be addressed promptly. Damaged trees may need to be removed to reduce the risk of dead trees falling on homes, structures, people, critical infrastructure, and utilities.

Before you remove any trees...

1. Assess trees to identify any dead or fire-weakened trees

Remember, some damaged trees may still survive. Several resources are available online to help you assess your trees, but you are also encouraged to consult with local experts, such as conservation district staff or DNR service foresters, who can provide post-fire tree and forest health assessments. Once it is safe to do so, a certified professional should remove dead trees that pose a threat to safety as soon as possible.

[Rapid Tree Survival Assessment Factsheet](#)

2. Obtain permits and adhere to local regulations

Trees located within a horizontal distance of 1 ½ times their tree height from permanent buildings (such as a house, barn, shop, or pump house) can be removed without obtaining a forest practices permit. However, such removal may require permits and/or approvals from local government and/or other state agencies. Before doing any tree removal, contact a local DNR Regulation Assistance Forester or Forest Practices Forester for permitting guidance.

Visit DNR's [Landowner Assistance Portal](#) or contact DNR's [Regulation Assistance Program](#) for further details and to find a forester in your area.

3. Contact Insurance

Reach out to your insurance provider to determine if tree removal costs are covered by insurance.

4. Have a plan for how you will manage the debris

Slash becomes its own hazard if it is left on the property. Is clean-up included in the removal service, or will you have to coordinate it otherwise? After a fire, coordinating debris removal and chipper days with neighbors can be a cost-effective way to remove burned trees and brush.



Photo: Fire Adapted Methow Valley.

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Important Considerations

Safety

Only return to your property once fire officials have deemed it safe, and use extreme caution when assessing fire damage. You should always wear appropriate personal protective gear, such as hard hats and boots, especially in proximity to fire-weakened trees. Once you're ready to remove trees, make sure you hire certified professionals with appropriate credentials.

Responsibility and Liability

A landowner's responsibility for removing damaged trees may vary depending on location and local jurisdictions. You should reach out to your city or county officials if you have questions regarding these responsibilities. Whether you invite volunteers or hire professionals to work on your property, make sure you are considering any liability concerns.

Financial Records

Always keep records and receipts. If FEMA is involved in the recovery because of a presidential declaration, there may be additional documentation required for reimbursement purposes.

Wildlife and Snags

Consider retaining dead and fire-weakened trees that do not pose a safety hazard to provide critical habitat for wildlife.



Species like the Downy Woodpecker use dead trees and snags for nesting.

Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Who to call for assistance...

Resource:	Description	How to Access
Washington State Conservation Districts	Conservation Districts can support landowners with post-fire recovery, including tree assessment and removal.	Find your local Conservation District on the State Conservation Commission Website
Washington State Department of Natural Resources	DNR staff and program resources may be able to assist with post-fire recovery and technical and financial assistance.	Visit the Landowner Assistance Portal to find foresters in your area.
Natural Resources Conservation Service	NRCS has offices throughout Washington where they can connect you with post-fire recovery resources and support.	Find your local service center on the NRCS website .
International Society of Arboriculture	A worldwide database of certified arborists for hire.	Search the online database to find an arborist