

after the fire

Hazard Tree Removal

Hazard Tree Removal consists of removing dead, and fire destroyed or damaged trees that pose a hazard to people, animals, personal property, utilities, and other structures that might be damaged from falling trees.

Assessing tree mortality is an important step in determining the risk to life and property. Consult with a NRCS forester (www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov), Registered Professional Forester (www.clfa.org) or Certified Arborist (www.treesaregood.org) for concerns related to potentially hazardous trees and removal.

Information is available for making an initial assessment of whether a tree is dead due to wildfire impacts: (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ca/newsroom/features/> - see CAL FIRE Tree Note - Fire Injured Conifers; California Native Plant Society Fire Recovery Guide; University of California - Recovering from Wildfire: A Guide for California's Forest Landowners).

Note: Only hazard trees should be considered for reduction or removal. Unless trees are clearly dead when identified by a professional, all other fire damaged trees should be left on the landscape at least through the first winter following wildfire. Many trees are not completely dead and many will likely sprout back. Disturbances to soil, slopes, understory vegetation, and/or any pre-existing plant materials and resident seedbank that may still exist should be minimized.

Some conifer hazard trees may have an economic value for wood products. Most often these are larger sized trees within a reasonable distance of a forest products processing location (e.g. sawmill). Utilizing forest trees for commercial purposes requires issuance of CAL FIRE Forest Practice Rules permit prepared by a RPF. Contact a RPF for more details and assessment of commercial use of wildfire related tree mortality.

Tree removal should be completed by qualified fallers and/or equipment operators, such as a Licensed Timber Operator (contact CAL FIRE - <https://www.fire.ca.gov/programs/resource-management/forest-practice/timber-harvesting/licensed-timber-operators-ltos/>) or a certified arborist. Trees should be thoroughly inspected prior to falling to identify any hazards such as cracks, undermined root systems or deformities in the trunk or canopy that can increase the complexity of falling the tree. When cutting hazard trees, soil disturbances should be limited including the number of vehicular trips across the landscape, especially if the tree exists on slopes and/or on erosive/unstable soil. This will help to minimize erosion and noxious weed introduction.

Cut-tree material is often more valuable left on-site. Broadcasting chips from dead trees back onto the burned land can help reduce erosion as long as the depth of chips is no more than 3 inches.

Note: A denser cover of chips will delay plant regeneration and reduce the potential for native seedbank to germinate. Additionally, spreading chips should be done just prior to the first rains and not when the soil may still be hot or smoldering from the fire being put out.

Lopping and scattering limbs and finer material on areas severely disturbed by fire-fighting equipment such as fire breaks and trails can help reduce surface runoff, erosion and improve soil condition by replacing organic matter and nutrients. Scatter depth shall be no more than 18 inches to allow for plant regeneration through the scatter. Do not scatter large, continuous amounts of woody debris as these may contribute to a fire hazard.

Removing hazardous trees in burned areas is dangerous due to a significant risk that burned trees may fall unexpectedly or drop branches on property owners or workers with little or no warning- especially during times of high winds, heavy precipitation and/or saturated soils. Always use the appropriate personal protection gear when operating a chainsaw, such as: hard hat, gloves, eye protection, hearing protection, chaps and steel toed boots. Use chainsaws with spark arresters and review their safety instructions. Review safety instructions when using machinery. In the years following the fire, many of the damaged or destroyed trees will begin to fall on their own as roots, trunks and limbs decay. Landowners should continue to be aware of these hazards.