COLORADO
Department of Public Health & Environment

2026 FLASH FLOOD GUIDANCE FOR MULTIPLE COUNTIES IN SOUTHWEST COLORADO

Guidance: Management and Disposal of Flood Debris

In response to the recent flooding in multiple counties in southwest Colorado, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment ("the department") is providing guidance and regulatory relief for the management and disposal of damaged or destroyed structures, vegetation debris, vehicles, spoiled food, household chemicals, and dead animals. This guidance only applies to flood debris resulting from the 2026 floods that began as early as mid-September in some locations, continued through October and possible additional flooding, should it extend into November of 2026 in southwest Colorado.

Flooding can create debris and waste that warrant a rapid response from homeowners and local governments. Prompt cleanup and proper management of flood debris help residents move forward while minimizing potential public health and environmental issues that can worsen the longer debris remains in place. For instance, prompt cleanup can prevent nuisance conditions, odors, disease, and water contamination from runoff. To enable timely cleanup of flood debris items referenced above, the department will temporarily not enforce certain regulatory requirements, as described below.

The department's choice not to apply certain regulatory requirements applies only to flood debris and sediment from the time and places mentioned above. The department will consider requests for similar treatment in the future if necessary.

Handling and Disposal of Flood Debris:

A) Vegetation

The department has determined it will not enforce the following regulatory requirements for vegetative debris:

1. Vegetative debris and sediment laying in place following the flood may be managed by the property owner or the property owner's contractor in accordance with local (city and county) rules and ordinances. The department will not enforce solid waste requirements so long as the management does not create a nuisance or violate the Water Quality Control Division's stormwater regulations.
2. Vegetative debris and sediment transported by stormwater (rain or other forms of precipitation) into ditches, natural or manmade ponds, or other low-lying areas may be removed to preserve the function of these structures. Vegetative debris and sediment wastes, once removed or stockpiled, must be managed in accordance with local (city or county) rules and ordinances. The department will not enforce solid waste requirements so long as the waste material does not create a nuisance, such as posing a fire risk, potential environmental contamination, or attracting rodents.
3. Handle and store vegetative debris to prevent release to storm drains, streams, ditches, and other surface waters. Store waste in upland areas away from concentrated stormwater flows, and in a manner that prevents erosion and transport of materials.

B) Household Hazardous Waste and Structures

The property owner or the property owner's contractor may manage damaged and destroyed structures. Household hazardous waste (“HHW”) (i.e. paints, car batteries, pesticides, etc.) from structures which are partially damaged but safe to enter can be disposed of at a County or municipal HHW facility (see also paragraph E) Household Chemicals). Handle structures in a way that minimizes potential exposure to unknown hazardous materials that may be present in a damaged structure or debris. Structures of any age may contain asbestos and residential structures built prior to 1978 may contain lead. Some inert debris (non-leachable) and sediment may be disposed of onsite (as described below). If you wish to bring debris from a damaged structure to a landfill, first contact the landfill to alert them that flood debris is coming and confirm the landfill will accept the waste.

C) Vehicles

Remove and manage fuel, oil, hydraulic fluid, and other automotive fluids from vehicles appropriately before recycling or disposing of the vehicle at a landfill.

D) Food Waste

Residents and businesses may dispose of spoiled, contaminated, or expired food at a landfill, take it to a local government-approved staging area, take it to a solid waste transfer station, or take it to a composting operation approved to accept food waste.

E) Household Chemicals

Household Chemicals (i.e., Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)) generated from residential structures can be taken to a county or municipal HHW facility for recycling or potential reuse. Check with your local environmental health representative to see if a temporary HHW collection site has been established. If residentially generated HHW cannot be safely removed from other flood debris or no recycling option is available, HHW can be taken to a landfill for disposal. Residents should contact the landfill or HHW facility before taking HHW to ensure the waste will be accepted.

F) Dead Animals

The property owner must follow the 2015 Animal Carcass Disposal Policy ("Policy") issued by the department. If the homeowner cannot meet the requirements of the preapproved plan defined in the Policy, they will need to submit a disposal plan to the department and the local governing body. Alternatively, homeowners may take dead animals to a landfill for final disposal.

G) Electronic Waste

Items such as televisions, computers, DVD players, and other electronic devices can be taken to an electronics recycler or electronics recycling collection location if the material is not adversely contaminated by sewage, septage, or other flood debris. Electronic waste submerged or damaged by water can still be recycled. If electronic waste cannot be safely recycled, the department may grant a temporary variance from the electronic waste landfill prohibition if the local government requests a waiver. More information about electronic waste is available on the department's electronic waste webpage [https://cdphe.colorado.gov/hm/ewaste].

H) Sandbags

Sandbags may be disposed temporarily stored at local government approved staging areas or taken directly to landfills for disposal. Sand from bags may be stored and reused in accordance with local requirements, and the bags sent to a landfill for disposal.

Temporary Staging Location for Flood Debris

The department will continue to work with local agencies that choose to establish temporary staging locations for flood debris. Certain waste and flood debris may not be accepted at temporary locations because of the high threat of vectors and other nuisance conditions. Please check with your local health department representatives for locations and acceptable waste and flood debris.

Asbestos

The Indoor Environment Program of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment ("the department") has been asked to detail the requirements for dealing with homes and public & commercial buildings damaged or destroyed by flooding.

I. For buildings partially damaged by the floodwaters (i.e., salvageable building materials remaining):

A Colorado certified asbestos building inspector, working for a registered Asbestos Consulting Firm, must inspect remaining building materials before renovation or demolition activities that impact the building materials. A list of registered Asbestos Consulting Firms and certified asbestos abatement contractors can be found on the department's website here: https://cdphe.colorado.gov/apcd-asbestos-support#inspectors

If asbestos-containing material is present in amounts greater than the trigger levels, it must be removed in accordance with Colorado Regulation No. 8, Part B. Trigger levels for single-family residential dwellings are 50 linear feet on pipes, 32 square feet on other surfaces, or the volume equivalent of a 55-gallon drum. Trigger levels for public and commercial buildings are 260 linear feet on pipes, 160 square feet on other surfaces, or the volume equivalent of a 55-gallon drum. Handle any remaining building material or debris as outlined in Section II. below.

Obtain a demolition approval notice from the Indoor Environment Program if you plan to remove a load-bearing structural member. Their contact information is included below in this document.

II. For buildings completely destroyed by the flood (i.e., only debris remains):

If no building materials remain to be sampled, handle the building debris in a way that minimizes potential exposure to asbestos fibers and other hazardous materials. Scrape the soil under and surrounding the building debris to a depth of at least two inches to ensure that all building debris has been removed from the site.

If asbestos-containing materials are known to be present in flood debris in amounts greater than regulatory trigger levels, they must be removed in accordance with Colorado Air Quality Control Commission Regulation No. 8, Part B. Trigger levels for single-family residential dwellings are 50 linear feet on pipes, 32 square feet on other surfaces, or the volume equivalent of a 55-gallon drum. Trigger levels for public and commercial buildings are 260 linear feet on pipes, 160 square feet on other surfaces, or the volume equivalent of a 55-gallon drum. If this is not known, the material may be handled as non-asbestos flood debris and disposed of at a permitted landfill.

A state-issued demolition permit is not required to remove the debris from buildings that have been partially or completely destroyed. However, flood debris may contain unknown substances, including chemicals. Take care when handling materials from buildings that are either partially damaged by the floods (i.e., salvageable building materials remain) or completely destroyed (i.e., only debris remains). Handle all debris in a way that minimizes potential exposure for both the people handling the material and those in the surrounding area. The heavy rains and flooding presumably have resulted in thoroughly wetted debris, which should minimize dust and related potential risks from airborne materials during cleanup (including, potentially, asbestos fibers).

The department will not require flood-soaked or thoroughly wetted asbestos-containing materials transported for immediate disposal at the landfills to be wrapped with plastic. Roll-offs and trucks need to be covered to prevent: 1) the materials from drying out and 2) the material from blowing out of the vehicles between the point of pick-up and disposal. If the material is thoroughly wetted from floodwaters/mud, potential airborne contaminants should be sufficiently contained for short-haul and immediate disposal. In addition, handling flood-soaked and muddy materials is difficult enough; adding plastic wrapping could increase the risk of personal injury and hamper timely, effective cleanup. If the debris or surrounding soil has dried, thoroughly wet it before handling.

The risk of asbestos fibers and other airborne contaminants could increase as the debris dries out. If the material is not thoroughly wetted, then, if possible, package the debris inside a 6-mil plastic sheeting liner. This contains the debris during transport from the site to the landfill.

People engaged in cleaning activities may want to wear respiratory protection, especially if the cleanup occurs after materials have dried out. A disposable particulate respirator certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to filter out potentially harmful particles will offer some protection if worn properly. Commonly available one-strap paper dust masks, which are designed to keep larger particles out of the nose and mouth, typically offer little protection. The same is true for bandanas (wet or dry) tied over the mouth and nose. Filter material rated "N95" will capture at least 95% of very small particles, while filter material rated "P100" filters out at least 99.97%. Please consult your physician about using respirators if you have a pre-existing heart or lung condition. Other personal protection may include protective clothing and gloves to avoid skin contact and eye protection.

Wash metal debris clean of mud/debris before recycling. Dispose of concrete debris (foundations) removed from a site at an approved landfill. If you wish to recycle concrete debris (foundations), a certified asbestos building inspector must inspect it and confirm it is free of asbestos-containing materials before recycling.

Notification and Permitting Requirements

Enforcement of state demolition permitting requirements (including fees) has been temporarily suspended. However, the building owner or contractor must submit written notification to the CDPHE Indoor Environment Program. Submit this notification using the Disposal Notification Form, 2026 Floods in Southwest Colorado. The required notification forms are attached to this guidance.

This guidance only applies to state protocols. This guidance does not alter any federal requirements (e.g., EPA, OSHA) that may also apply with respect to debris cleanup and worker safety. Please contact the appropriate federal agencies if you have questions regarding the applicability of their regulations.

For additional asbestos information, please contact the CDPHE Indoor Environment Program at: 720-507-5136 or cdphe.asbestos@state.co.us

For additional information on hazardous or solid waste, please contact the Customer Technical Assistance line at: 303-692-3320 or comments.hmwmd@state.co.us

Flood Debris Disposal Sites:

The following landfills may accept flood debris containing friable and non-friable asbestos, but please contact the landfill before delivering flood-generated waste for disposal:

Archuleta Landfill
9179 County Road 500
Pagosa Springs, CO 81147
Doug Poynor, Landfill Manager
Phone: 970-398-6106

Bondad Landfill
1500 County Road 318
Durango, CO 81303
Ted Risberg, Environmental Manager
Phone: 970-508-4803

Montezuma County Landfill
26100 County Road F
Cortez, CO 81321-8104
Mel Jarmon, Landfill Manager
Phone: (970) 565-9858

San Luis Valley Regional Landfill
1600 County Road 44
Monte Vista, CO 81144
Kim Burns, Landfill Manager
Phone: 719-852-3810

- Please contact the landfill before loads are taken there to confirm waste acceptance, to alert them that the material is coming and to initiate a waste profile if required. Inform the landfills that the material came from structures in the flood area. Please take debris directly to the landfill, not a transfer station.
- Recycling metal and concrete foundations is permissible under the following circumstances: Metal debris must be washed clean prior to recycling. If you wish to recycle a concrete foundation, a Colorado certified asbestos building inspector must inspect the concrete to confirm it is free from asbestos containing materials before recycling.
- White Goods and Refrigerants - The term “white goods” is used to describe major household appliances such as washers, dryers, refrigerators, freezers, hot water heaters and other larger appliances. Because white goods are manufactured with a high percentage of metal, they are favorable for recycling. Prior to recycling or disposal at a permitted landfill, white goods containing refrigerants must have those refrigerants properly recovered and handled with EPA-approved equipment. The facility accepting the white goods for final disposal or recycling must keep documentation verifying refrigerant recovery onsite for three years. Refrigerants include but are not necessarily limited to chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

Additional Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment contacts:

If you need additional solid waste information, please contact:

- David Snapp at 303-726-6836 or david.snapp@state.co.us,
- Jerry Henderson at 720-263-0710 or jerry.henderson@state.co.us, or
- Jennifer McCarter at 303-691-4983 or jennifer.mccarter@state.co.us

For hazardous waste disposal information, please contact:

- Amy Williams at 720-822-8285 or amy.williams@state.co.us, or
- David Foster at 720-768-4726 or david.w.foster@state.co.us

DISPOSAL NOTIFICATION FORM

Public and Commercial Buildings and Buildings Subject to the Asbestos NESHAP
2026 Floods in Southwest Colorado

Only applicable for public and commercial buildings and buildings subject to the asbestos NESHAP completely destroyed or rendered unsafe to inspect by these floods. There is no fee associated with this notification.

Building Owner	Owner's Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	
Site Address	Building Name (Type of Structure) :		
	Street:		
	City:	County:	Zip Code:
Disposal Contractor	Company/Contractor's Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	
Landfill	Landfill Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	

Submit form by mail or email (no fee is required) to:

Indoor Environment Program Permit Coordinator
Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment
APCD-IE-B1
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South
Denver, CO 80246-1530
cdphe.asbestos@state.co.us

Please call (720) 507-5136 with any questions.

DISPOSAL NOTIFICATION FORM

Residential Buildings Impacted by the 2026 Floods in Southwest Colorado

Only applicable for residential buildings completely destroyed or rendered unsafe to inspect by these floods. There is no fee associated with this notification.

Building Owner	Owner's Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	
Site Address	Building Name (Type of Structure)		
	Street:		
	City:	County:	Zip Code:
Disposal Contractor	Company/Contractor's Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	
Landfill	Landfill Name:		
	Street:		
	City:	State:	Zip Code:
		Telephone # ( )	

Submit form by mail or email (no fee is required) to:

Indoor Environment Program Permit Coordinator
Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment
APCD-IE-B1
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South
Denver, CO 80246-1530
cdphe.asbestos@state.co.us

Please call (720) 507-5136 with any questions.