



State of Mississippi

TATE REEVES

Governor

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

CHRIS WELLS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Emergency Debris Management Guidance January 26, 2026

MDEQ has developed this information in response to the severe weather events that occurred in the State of Mississippi on or around January 25, 2025. Where a severe storm event results in the urgent need for additional public solid waste management facilities or management options, affected local governments may request emergency approval for a temporary emergency debris management site. The Mississippi Nonhazardous Solid Waste Management Regulations allow the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to issue such an emergency approval for a temporary debris management site or facility for immediate operation, subject to stipulated operating conditions.

This document provides guidance to affected local governments (including cities, counties and other local and state government organizations) on selecting temporary emergency debris sites for the purpose of staging or chipping of vegetative debris or for the temporary storage of building and structural debris and other related solid wastes. This document also provides information on how to request authorization for such emergency sites from the MDEQ.

MDEQ may also consider proposals for the controlled burning of vegetative debris in high impact areas or for an emergency disposal site for the burial of the vegetative debris on a case-by-case basis, where adequate local disposal capacity and other suitable disposal options do not exist. Local governments interested in pursuing such debris disposal options should contact the MDEQ Waste Division for specific guidance at 601-961-5171.

Selecting Temporary Emergency Debris Storage, Chipping, or Burning Sites

1. In evaluating potential emergency debris sites proposed by the local government for the temporary storage, chipping, or burning of vegetative debris; or the storage of structural/building debris, the following location restrictions apply and should be considered when selecting a site:

STORAGE/CHIPPING SITES: Sites which stage or store vegetative or building debris or which process vegetative debris into chips or mulch shall maintain at least a 500-foot setback distance between the debris storage or processing areas and any occupied dwelling.

BURN SITES: Sites which stage and burn vegetative debris should have a 1500-foot setback distance between vegetative debris burning areas and any occupied dwelling (and the

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aforementioned 500 feet between the debris storage area and the occupied dwelling). The use of adequate, forced-draft air systems in the burning of the debris is required to control emissions from the burning activity. The burning of building or structural debris will not be allowed.

ALL DEBRIS MANAGEMENT SITES/ACTIVITIES:

- a) All debris management sites should have a 250-foot setback distance between the debris burning, storage and/or processing areas and the nearest property line.
- b) All debris management sites should have a 250-foot setback distance between the debris burning, storage and/or processing areas and the nearest state water body (e.g. lakes, rivers, creeks, streams, etc).
- c) Debris management activities or sites should not be located on properties in such manner that will impact wetlands or that would result in wastes being placed in low lying or flood prone areas.
- d) Debris management sites should not be located in close proximity to public drinking water supply wells or to individual private drinking water wells.
- e) Sites with any pre-existing environmental problems, illegal dumping problems, or other similar conditions should be avoided for use in storm debris management, unless such problems can be mitigated prior to such use being implemented.

Sites that do not meet these requirements should not be considered for management of storm debris.

2. Proposed debris management sites should be large enough in area to comply with the location restrictions outlined in this guidance document and to accommodate the estimated quantity of vegetative or structural debris. Incoming debris and waste materials should be limited to a reasonable and manageable height. Where debris is simply brought to a site for storage, local governments should consider placement of appropriately sized dumpsters or roll-off containers at the location to facilitate storage and transport and to prevent double handling of the wastes. To prevent fires or spontaneous combustion at sites where the debris is chipped or mulched, the chipped debris piles should not exceed a height of twelve (12) feet. Chippers should be present on-site when storage activities begin and chipped debris must be removed on a frequency adequate to maintain compliance with approved storage limits (typically 10,000 cubic yards of total debris (raw plus chips).
3. If a local government chooses to consider the use of 16th Section property for a temporary emergency debris management site, such action must be properly coordinated with the appropriate local school district officials and the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office, prior to requesting authorization for the site from MDEQ. Documentation of such coordination must be provided with the local government's request.
4. MDEQ encourages that, where possible, proposed debris management sites be owned or controlled by the affected city, county or state government entity. In the event that the property selected is owned or controlled by a private interest, the responsibility for obtaining the proper access to the site will be with the local/state government or other authorized agent of the local/state government entity. Responsibility for the operation and closure of the site may fall jointly with the local government, the private property owner or other authorized agent of the

local government subject to the terms of site operating agreements. Any proposed sites requested for authorization which are owned or controlled by a private interest must have the written approval of the local government in the form of a city or county letter, and must have the written approval of the property owner.

Requesting Authorization for a Temporary Emergency Debris Storage, Chipping, and/or Burn Site

1. Local governments impacted by a disaster or severe storm event and faced with the need to manage large quantities of vegetative or building debris at a temporary location(s) should submit a written request to MDEQ on agency forms for authorization to operate the emergency debris management site. The request should:
 - Include a completed and signed copy of the MDEQ [Local Government Request for A Temporary Emergency Debris Management Site Form](#) located on the MDEQ Waste Division website (www.mdeq.ms.gov/waste) under Solid Waste Management and Recycling Programs/Emergency Debris Information. The form requests contact information and much of the information described below;
 - Provide written confirmation that the affected local government has determined that the conditions from the storm require the use of a temporary emergency management site(s) for the storm debris. This information would include estimates of the amount and types of storm debris in the jurisdiction, the lack of available permitted landfills or other solid waste disposal facilities in the impacted areas (see the “Active Solid Waste Facility Listing” on the [MDEQ Waste Division website](#)), and the type of facility needed (e.g. storage, burning, chipping, etc.);
 - Describe the type of operations that will be conducted at the site such as debris storage, chipping, or burning, and the wastes that will be brought to the site. Such wastes could include vegetative debris such as trees, limbs, leaves and other vegetation, or building and structural debris such as brick, wood, siding, metal sheeting, roofing materials, furniture, and other materials. MDEQ will not authorize the burning of building or structural debris. In order to develop a site to store or manage household garbage or household hazardous wastes or chemicals, the local government should contact MDEQ for further guidance;
 - Include a site map, physical address, GPS coordinates, and directions which identify the temporary site location;
 - Include a description of the site’s ability to comply with the location restrictions identified in No. 1 of the site selection criteria of this guidance;
 - Include an estimate of the time necessary to start and complete all emergency operations, including final clean up and closure of the site;
 - Include a written statement from the site property owner(s) acknowledging concurrence with the use of the property as an emergency debris management site;
 - Include a description of the manner in which the site will be operated and the name and contact information for any debris contractors that may be operating the site on behalf of the local government. If the site operations involve burning debris, describe the types of forced-draft air systems to be used in the operations;
 - Include a description of the plans for final disposal or for beneficial use of all debris, ash, chipped wood and any other solid wastes brought to the site; and
 - Include the name of a contact person and contact information (phone numbers, mailing addresses, etc.) of a person responsible for the proper operation of the site.

2. The request for emergency authorization should be transmitted by the affected local government to the MDEQ Waste Division by email.

Please email the request form and associated documents to:

Trent Jones at tjones@mdeq.ms.gov

If you do not have access to email, you may transmit the request as follows:

By Fax: 601-961-5785

By U.S. Mail:

MS Dept of Environmental Quality
Waste Division
P.O. Box 2261
Jackson, MS 39225

By Courier or Delivery:

MS Dept of Environmental Quality
Waste Division
515 East Amite Street
Jackson, MS 39201

3. Upon receipt of the request, MDEQ may conduct an inspection of the site (if we have not already done so) to ensure that the surrounding areas will not be adversely impacted by the proposed operations.
4. If the request for authorization is approved, the MDEQ will issue a letter of temporary authorization to the local government or local government agent responsible for the emergency debris site. This letter of temporary authorization will outline the operating requirements, time limitations, closure requirements and any other guidelines that may apply. The MDEQ reserves the right to inspect the temporary site at all reasonable times. Furthermore, should the responsible parties, including local governments, landowners and/or contractors fail to adhere to the restrictions outlined in the MDEQ's letter of authorization or other pertinent laws, regulations or ordinances, additional operating conditions may be required, or operations may be terminated by the MDEQ.
5. If the operator has any questions on the operations or the process for approval of an emergency debris management site, contact the MDEQ Waste Division at 601-961-5171 for assistance.