

Below is a section out of FEMA's Debris Management Guide (FEMA 325) specific to vegetative debris removal. You can see the entire guide at <http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/demagde.shtm#3>

Field Eligibility Determinations

To assist in implementation of the Public Assistance Program and the applicants' understanding of it, FEMA has established specific eligibility guidance for debris. This section addresses the most common eligibility issues for various types of debris and recommends documentation for Public Assistance grant consideration. Consultation with the State and FEMA is advised for scenarios not addressed within this section.

Only FEMA has the authority to make eligibility determinations for Public Assistance grant funding; contractors cannot make eligibility determinations. Information on eligibility can be found in FEMA 321 – Public Assistance Policy Digest, FEMA 322 – Public Assistance Guide, FEMA 323 – Public Assistance Applicant Handbook, and this document.

Vegetative Debris Eligibility

Vegetative debris consists of whole trees, tree stumps, tree branches, tree trunks, and other leafy material. Depending on the size of the debris, the collection of vegetative debris may require the use of flat bed trucks, dump trucks, and grapple loaders.

Most vegetative debris consists of large piles of tree limbs and branches that are piled on the public rights-of-way by the residents. The collection of this type of debris is eligible for reimbursement if it is within public rights-of-way and collected by an eligible applicant. Applicants normally limit the number of times the debris is collected; for instance, the applicant may choose to make two passes throughout the jurisdiction before resuming its normal collection activities. The applicant should discuss with FEMA the number of passes that may be eligible.

Vegetative debris is bulky and consumes a significant volume of landfill space if buried. To minimize the use of landfill space, it is prudent to reduce the volume of vegetative debris before burying. Vegetative debris may be reduced by as much as 75 percent of its volume by mulching or grinding and as much as 90 percent of its volume through burning technologies. Costs to reduce vegetative debris are eligible for Public Assistance grant funding if found to be reasonable.

A hazardous tree or stump may be collected individually, while downed or fallen debris is collected from rights-of-way or at a designated collection center. Tree and stump collection prices are typically based on the size of the tree or stump and charged by unit. Other fallen or downed material is usually billed by weight (tons) or volume (cubic yards).

Determining eligibility for hazardous trees and stumps is challenging. FEMA has established criteria to assist in making these eligibility determinations, using objective information that can be collected in the field.

Hazardous Trees

Removing a hazardous tree may be eligible for Public Assistance grant funding. A tree is considered hazardous if its condition was caused by the disaster; it is an immediate threat to lives, public health and safety, or improved property; it has a diameter breast height of six inches or greater; **and one or more of the following criteria are met:**

- It has more than 50 percent of the crown damaged or destroyed;
- It has a split trunk or broken branches that expose the heartwood;
- It has fallen or been uprooted within a public-use area; and/or
- It is leaning at an angle greater than 30 degrees.

Trees determined to be hazardous and that have **less than 50 percent of the root-ball exposed** should be cut flush at the ground level. Grinding of the resulting stump after the tree has been cut flush at the ground level is not eligible work. The cut portion of the tree is included with regular vegetative debris. The applicant should make an effort to cut the tree trunk as close to the ground as possible.

The eligible scope of work for a hazardous tree may include removing the leaning portion and cutting the stump at ground level. An example of an ineligible costing method for such work would be removing the tree and stump for two separate unit costs.

The Public Assistance Program may reimburse straightening and bracing if they are less costly than removal and disposal. Straightening and bracing are emergency protective measures if they eliminate an immediate threat to lives, public health and safety, or improved property. If an applicant chooses to straighten and brace a tree in lieu of removal, the tree would not be eligible for removal if it dies.

Hazardous Limb Removal (Hangers)

Removing hanging limbs may be eligible for Public Assistance grant assistance. Limbs must be:

- Located on improved public property;
- Greater than two inches in diameter at the point of breakage; and
- Still hanging in a tree and threatening a public-use area, e.g. trails, sidewalks, golf cart paths.

Only the minimum amount of work necessary to remove the hazard is eligible. Pruning, maintenance trimming, and landscaping are not eligible. Work should be executed in an efficient manner. For example, all hazardous limbs in a tree should be cut at the same time, not in passes for particular sizes. Work to remove hanging limbs from a tree that has been determined to be a hazard and is scheduled for removal is not eligible. If this work is contracted out, it is typically done on a per tree basis.

An eligible scope of work may be to cut the branch at the closest main branch junction. Removing the entire branch back to the trunk may not be eligible.

If the canopy of a tree located on private property extends over a public right-of-way such as a sidewalk, removal of hazardous limbs on the tree that extend over the public right-of-way and meet the above criteria may be eligible. Limbs on the tree that do not extend over the public right-of-way are not eligible.

Documentation required for Public Assistance grant consideration:

- Describe the immediate threat, e.g. photos of hanging limbs or leaning trees;
- Clearly define the scope of work to remove the immediate threat;
- Specify the improved public property location by recording the nearest building address and/or GPS location; and
- Denote date, labor (force account or contract), and equipment used to perform the work.

Hazardous Tree Stumps

A stump may be determined to be hazardous and eligible for Public Assistance grant funding as a per-unit cost for stump removal if it meets all of the following criteria:

- It has 50 percent or more of the root-ball exposed (less than 50 percent of the root-ball exposed should be flush cut);
- It is greater than 24 inches in diameter, as measured 24 inches above the ground;
- It is on improved public property or a public right-of-way; and
- It poses an immediate threat to life, and public health and safety.

If an uprooted stump must be removed **prior to FEMA's approval**, the applicant must submit the following information for Public Assistance grant consideration:

- Photographs and GPS coordinates that establish the location on public property;
- Specifics of the threat;
- Diameter of the stump 24 inches from the ground; and
- Quantity of material needed to fill the resultant hole.

FEMA may reimburse a reasonable cost to remove, transport, dispose of, and fill the hole from a stump of **more than 24 inches in diameter** if:

- The applicant and State agree the tree or stump is hazardous according to the above definition;
- Generally, FEMA approved the removal in advance; and
- A Hazardous Stump Worksheet is completed and submitted for FEMA approval. A copy of the Hazardous Stump Worksheet may be found in Appendix G, *FEMA DAP9523.11, Hazardous Stump Extraction and Removal Eligibility*.

In some instances, grinding of an uprooted stump and filling the resulting cavity may cost less than a complete extraction. In these cases, the applicant should present the cost comparison documentation to FEMA for consideration; however, the stump must have already been determined eligible for removal according to the above criteria.

Stumps measuring **24 inches in diameter or less** do not require special equipment for removal; therefore, reimbursement will be based on the reasonable unit cost per cubic yard, using the Stump Conversion Table found in Appendix G, *FEMA DAP9523.11, Hazardous Stump Extraction and Removal Eligibility*. The unit price for stump removal includes the extraction, transport, and disposal of the stump as well as filling the cavity that remains.

FEMA will reimburse the applicant at the unit cost rate (usually cubic yards) for normal debris removal for all stumps, regardless of size, placed on the public rights-of-way by others, i.e., contractors did not extract them from public property or property of eligible PNP organizations. In such instances, applicants do not incur additional costs to remove these stumps; the same equipment used to pick up vegetative debris can be used to pick up these stumps.

See Appendix G, *FEMA DAP9523.11, Hazardous Stump Extraction and Removal Eligibility* for more information on hazardous stumps.