

Emergency Removal of Debris from Streams

Introduction

The removal of debris from within a stream channel should be done in such a manner as to avoid altering the stream channel or banks, including vegetation, woody or otherwise. Debris removal that can be completed from the streambank, such as lifting out the debris, can in most cases be conducted without formal authorization or notification to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). This also applies to debris that has accumulated in and around a structure, such as a bridge or a culvert.

Pre-Approval from DEP

When removal of debris that has accumulated in and around existing bridges and culverts (within 50 feet up and downstream) requires equipment to enter the stream in order to facilitate the removal, DEP must authorize the activity verbally or in writing prior to conducting the removal.

Prior to removing debris, such as trees, logs, brush, or similar material from streams, contact the local DEP regional office. DEP may provide approvals over the telephone for the emergency removal of debris blocking streams, especially where the debris may cause a backwater condition and increase the potential for more flooding. In larger debris areas or if you need advice on how to remove debris, DEP staff can visit a site to assist in determining the best way to remove debris. Depending on the scope of the project, authorization may also be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

In the situation where a bridge or culvert is in danger of failure or a portion thereof has already failed, the local DEP regional office must be notified immediately, and the collapsed portion of the structure should then be removed outside the floodplain of the stream.

Permitting Options

DEP may authorize the repair or replacement of structures that have been damaged or lost due to flooding with an Emergency Permit. If stream dredging or changes to the streambank or channel are proposed, an Emergency Permit approval from DEP may be required. This is described in the fact sheet entitled "Permitting Options for Flood-Damaged Bridges and Other Water Obstructions and Encroachments." Removal of gravel and flood debris beyond 50 feet upstream and downstream of a permitted bridge, culvert or other structure where the work cannot be accomplished from the bank, requires notification to DEP. All debris removed should be disposed of in a safe, upland area avoiding any wetlands.

Document Your Costs

Local governments are reminded to document their costs for the removal or repair of water obstructions and encroachments that have been damaged or lost due to flooding and debris removal for later possible reimbursement by the federal government. Pictures of debris, equipment and labor costs can be kept to document removal costs. Be sure to take pictures of the damage before any work has begun. Questions about documentation should be directed to county emergency management officials and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).

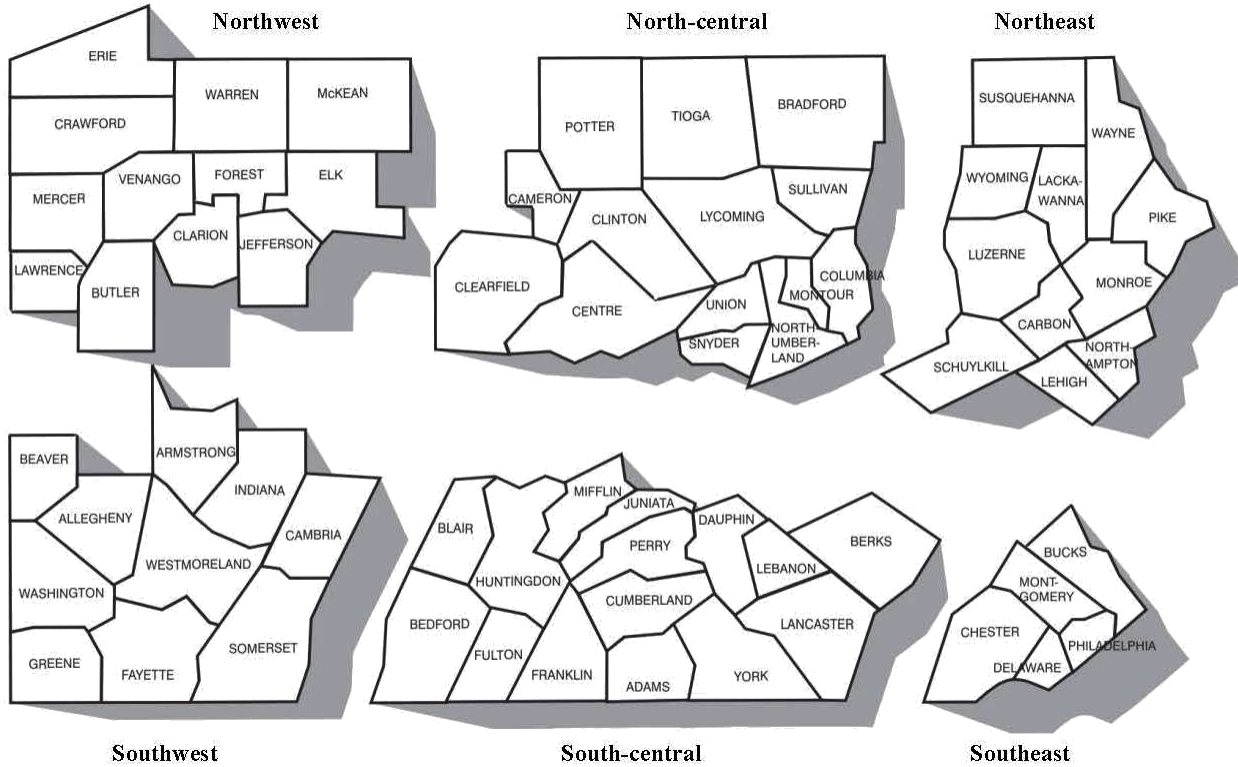
Preventative Measures

One way to keep debris from blocking a water opening is routine maintenance. Conducting routine maintenance is a condition of all water obstruction and encroachment permits and can, if done properly, minimize the buildup of debris after large storm events. It is important to maintain the hydraulic opening of the water obstruction and encroachment to help prevent future damage from flooding. Routine channel maintenance is authorized and limited to a maximum of 50 feet upstream and downstream of

the bridge or culvert and should be conducted in accordance with DEPs Standards for Channel Cleaning at Bridges and Culverts.

Contact the local DEP regional office about the handling and disposal of flood debris. (County names are listed below for each regional office.)

DEP REGIONAL OFFICES



Northwest Region

230 Chestnut St.
 Meadville, PA 16335-3481
 Main Telephone: 814-332-6945
 24-Hour Emergency: 800-373-3398

Counties: Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango, and Warren

North-central Region

208 W. Third St., Suite 101
 Williamsport, PA 17701
 Main Telephone: 570-327-3636
 24-Hour Emergency: 570-327-3636

Counties: Bradford, Cameron, Clearfield, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga, and Union

Northeast Region

2 Public Square
 Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701-1915
 Main Telephone: 570-826-2511
 24-Hour Emergency: 570-826-2511

Counties: Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming

Southwest Region

400 Waterfront Drive
 Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
 Main Telephone: 412-442-4000
 24-Hour Emergency: 412-442-4000

Counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland

South-central Region

909 Elmerton Ave.
 Harrisburg, PA 17110
 Main Telephone: 717-705-4700
 24-Hour Emergency: 866-825-0208

Counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry, and York

Southeast Region

2 E. Main St.
 Norristown, PA 19401
 Main Telephone: 484-250-5900
 24-Hour Emergency: 484-250-5900

Counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia

For more information, visit www.dep.pa.gov.