

## **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).

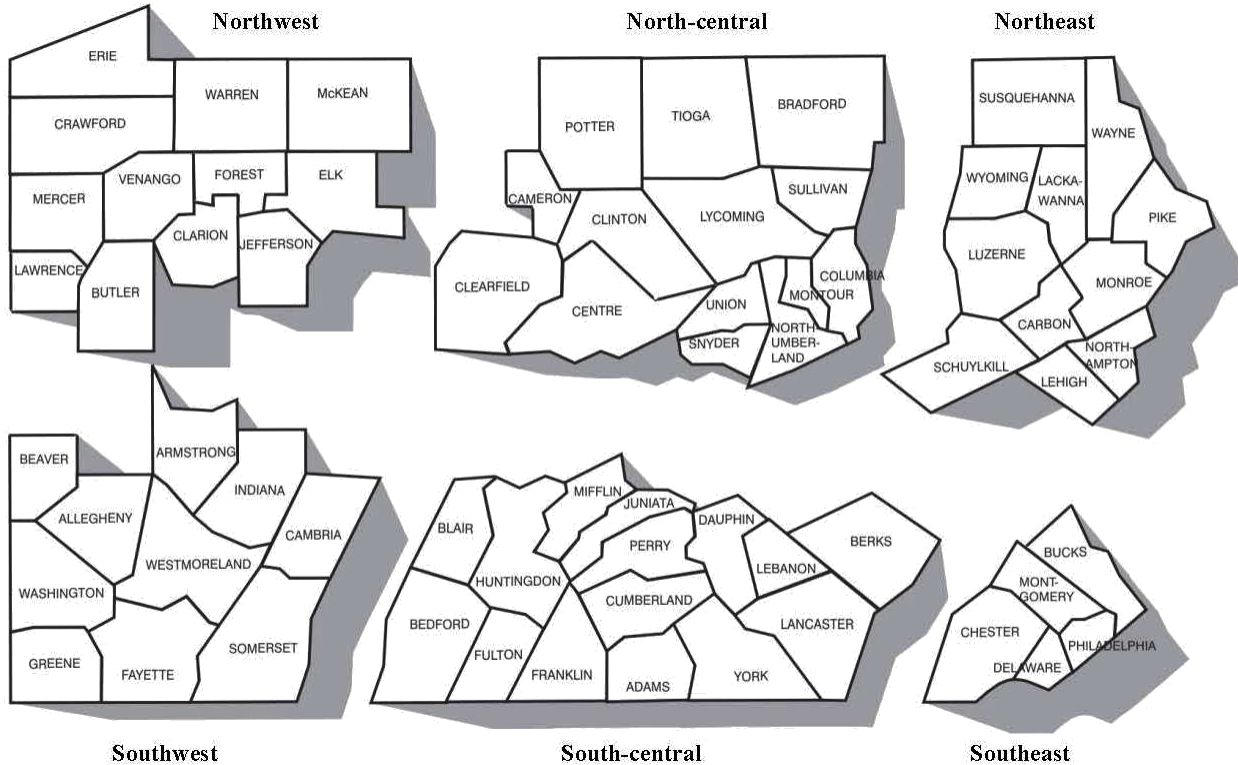
### **Preventative Measures**

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](http://www.dep.pa.gov).