
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Senator Henry Stern
Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	SB 1263	Hearing Date:	4/14/2026
Author:	McGuire		
Version:	2/19/2026	Introduced	
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Cassie Royce		

SUBJECT: Contractors: debris removal

SUMMARY: Prohibits a contractor from engaging in debris removal in a declared disaster unless they hold a specified license and classification, and requires any licensee authorized to perform debris removal during a declared emergency or in a declared disaster area to have passed an approved hazardous substance certification exam and comply with certain hazardous waste operations and emergency response standards.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Designates Cal OES as the lead agency responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies, including responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property.
- 2) Authorizes the Cal OES to administer a disaster assistance program under the California Disaster Assistance Act to provide state reimbursement for costs incurred by local governments, including debris removal, resulting from a disaster event for which a state of emergency has been proclaimed.
- 3) Establishes the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) as the state agency tasked by Cal OES to manage contracts for wildfire debris cleanup and removal.
- 4) Establishes the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) to license and regulate contractors and home improvement salespersons.

- 5) Specifies the following four categories of contracting business and their respective scope of work in existing regulations:
 - a) General engineering contracting (A)
 - b) General building contracting (B1)
 - c) Residential remodeling contracting (B2)
 - d) Specialty contracting (C)
- 6) Requires employees performing fire cleanup work, including ash, soot, and debris removal, to meet hazardous waste operations and emergency response (HAZWOPER) standards under the Department of Industrial Relations, and their employers to provide mandated hazard training and proper protective equipment to employees.

This bill:

- 1) Provides a contractor shall not engage in debris removal, including muck out and ash out services, unless the contractor has one of the following licenses or classifications:
 - a) A - General Engineering Contractor.
 - b) B - General Building Contractor.
 - c) C-12 –Specialty Contractor Classification for Earthwork and Paving and C-21 –Specialty Contractor Classification for Building Moving/Demolition.
- 2) Requires any contractor licensee authorized to perform debris removal, during a declared federal, state, or local emergency or for a declared disaster area due to a natural disaster, to have passed a CSLB Hazardous Substance Removal Certification examination and comply with HAZWOPER requirements.

Background

Author's statement. According to the author, "As California faces increasingly destructive natural disasters, safe debris removal and disposal are essential components of disaster recovery. Improper handling of hazardous debris can create significant risks to public health, worker safety, and the environment. SB 1263 clarifies who is authorized to conduct debris removal in declared disaster areas—including muck-out and ash-out operations—and requires that all who perform this work possess hazardous substance removal certifications and comply with HAZWOPER standards. These crucial safeguards will help ensure appropriate clearing of disaster sites while protecting workers and impacted communities."

Emergency response debris removal. According to Cal OES, emergency response debris removal activities are considered necessary to eliminate immediate threats to life, public health, and safety; to remediate significant damage to public or private property, or, for the permanent repair, restoration, or reconstruction of damaged public facilities. Local government entities are encouraged to develop debris management plans that define essential agency roles and personnel necessary to execute debris clearance, removal and disposal activities and address collection and disposal of various types of debris. Cal OES notes the plan should also describe a process to assess the magnitude and type of debris resulting from an event as it transitions from a locally proclaimed disaster to a state proclaimed and federally declared disaster.

Wildfire debris cleanup and removal. Under current law in the Public Resources Code, CalRecycle is designated by Cal OES to prequalify contractors to enter into contracts in communities impacted by wildfires. These contracts may be executed before the onset of major damage to retain the contractor in readiness to respond to incidents as needed. Work performed under the contract must be limited to preparation, removal, transport, and recycling or disposal of metals, ash, debris, concrete foundations and flatwork, potentially dangerous trees, and contaminated soil on residential and public properties included in the structural debris removal function.

In the wake of the 2025 wildfires in Los Angeles, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Executive Order (EO) N-5-25, which described “the urgent need to expeditiously develop a comprehensive plan for debris removal and execute the contracts and take other actions necessary to expeditiously implement that plan.” With federal assistance, debris removal teams began work to clean up household hazardous waste, including paint, ammunition, pesticides, propane tanks, and batteries in both conventional and electric vehicles. The EO directed state agencies “to develop a comprehensive plan for expeditiously removing debris from impacted properties to allow the rebuilding process to commence as quickly as possible, including the prompt execution of contracts with debris removal vendors with a proven track record of successfully delivering services on a timely and cost-effective basis.”

Since the LA fires, the CSLB reports receiving inquiries about whether contractors digging to remove contaminated materials from these devastated areas are trained or have the qualifications to do the work safely. Currently, according to the CSLB, there is no designation in Contractors Law as to who can perform debris removal during a declared disaster. CSLB states that, out of necessity, it has made this determination on a case-by-case basis during recent declared disasters, but a permanent solution is needed. By specifying who is authorized to perform debris removal during a declared disaster, including muck-out and ash-out operations, and

requiring that contractors possess sufficient training and certification to conduct debris removal, the CSLB notes this bill enhances worker safety and mitigates the risk of additional health and environmental hazards resulting from improper debris removal and disposal practices.

Prior/Related Legislation

SB 641 (Ashby) of 2025 contained substantially similar provisions to this bill, but was vetoed due to other unrelated provisions.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

Associated General Contractors, California Chapters
Contractors State License Board

OPPOSITION:

None on file

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of the bill, the CSLB writes, “SB 1263 specifies who is authorized to perform debris removal during a declared disaster and ensures they have the proper safety and training needed to safeguard public safety and mitigate additional health and environmental hazards in the aftermath.”

DUAL REFERRAL: Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development Committee and Senate Emergency Management Committee