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County OKs plan to remove fire debris

By Craig Gustafson
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County officials yesterday launched a \$30 million debris-removal program to quickly and safely haul away the remnants of more than 1,800 buildings damaged or destroyed by the recent wildfires in unincorporated areas.

The county plans to hire one major contractor by next week to tackle the massive job and pay residents' upfront costs for debris removal regardless of whether they have insurance. The city of San Diego has announced similar plans.

Cleanup in the unincorporated areas is expected to begin the week of Nov. 19 and be completed before the end of December.

County supervisors yesterday unanimously approved the program, which is funded with \$23 million from the state's Office of Emergency Services and \$7 million from the county's general fund.

The program is voluntary. Participants would forward any insurance money for debris removal they later receive to county and state officials. Those without insurance wouldn't pay anything.

But before cleanup can begin, the county and state and federal environmental officials plan to have hazardous waste – such as vehicle batteries, propane tanks and pool chemicals – cleared from the damaged areas over the next week.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Ron Roberts said the program will allow the county to apply uniform standards, especially for disposing of hazardous materials. He said it also allows residents to move forward without waiting for insurance reimbursements.

“We want to make sure this happens swiftly and safely,” Roberts said.

County officials estimate more than 1,000 homes and 800 structures – from barns to guest houses – in the unincorporated areas were affected by the wildfires.

The county is mailing forms to the temporary addresses they have on file for property owners who have been affected. The forms provide the county with the owner's insurance information and permission to enter the property.

The forms also are available at sdcountyrecovery.com or by calling toll-free (877) 308-8111.

The city of San Diego is giving residents two options for debris removal.

The first is similar to the county's approach. The city has hired a contractor to do the work and pay for all costs

not covered by the property owner's insurance.

The second option is a voucher program in which residents can pick up coupons good at various disposal sites throughout the city.

For more information on either option, go to the Rancho Bernardo Disaster Recovery Center, 18448 W. Bernardo Drive. The vouchers will be available there through Nov. 16.

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