

Tsunami Debris on California's North Coast

The March 11, 2011, tsunami produced five million tons of debris. Most of the debris stayed near Japan, but NOAA estimates 1.5 million tons were caught in the Pacific Ocean currents and pushed by winds towards North America. Tsunami debris may begin arriving on the North Coast later this year and continue over the next several years.

What You Should Do

Tsunami debris is no different than any other debris you find on the beach. If you find debris that may be from the tsunami, ask yourself if it is hazardous or not.

Hazardous - Call 911

Oil or chemical drums, gas cans, or propane tanks may be hazardous. If you think the debris poses a risk to health and safety, contact authorities right away.

Not Hazardous

Post your observations at DisasterDebris@noaa.gov or call the U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center 1-800-424-8802

The overwhelming majority of the tsunami debris will not be dangerous. NOAA is interested in tracking tsunami debris that washes up along US coasts. If the items have identification, NOAA can help trace the item back to its owner.

***If you don't know what it is, don't touch it.
If it might be hazardous, call 911.***

A Bigger Problem – The Northern Pacific Garbage Dump

Debris from the Japan tsunami highlights the much bigger and longer term problem of debris from human activities in the world's oceans. Find out more about both tsunami debris and the global marine debris problem at:

www.marinedebris.noaa.gov, <http://disasterdebris.wordpress.com/>

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it radioactive? Debris from the tsunami is no more likely to be radioactive than debris from any other source. The nuclear releases did not occur until long after the debris was washed out to sea. The debris found either on the coast outside of Fukushima, Japan or elsewhere in the Pacific has not shown any radioactivity.

Will there be body parts? It has been over a year since the tsunami. NOAA considers it extremely unlikely that there will be any human remains in the debris.

What will the debris look like? Anything that floats such as: Styrofoam, rubber, wood, plastic, boats, fishing supplies. It may include canisters, metal drums and other floatable containers. There may be wire and metal connected to the floating material and sharp edges. The debris is very dispersed and it is unlikely that it will arrive in large concentrations.

When will it arrive in Northern California? Some Debris may arrive this year, but the bulk is likely to arrive in the spring of 2013. It will continue to arrive for several years.

Who will pay for the cleanup? Tsunami debris is no different than any other debris on the beach or in the water. Local agencies will manage hazardous debris. Agencies and organizations with coastal jurisdiction will handle all other tsunami debris similar to any other debris found. Beach clean-up groups will likely encounter some tsunami debris along with ordinary beach litter. If a hazardous situation arises that is beyond the ability of local authorities to handle, assistance will be requested from the state.

