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Lee County Solid Waste update: Debris removal being addressed

Fort Myers, FL, Sept. 22, 2017 – Lee County Solid Waste will begin regular curbside collection of yard waste Monday. This is the final step in resuming regularly scheduled pickup to households across Lee County since Hurricane Irma hit Sept. 10. Curbside household waste pickup and recycling pickup resumed earlier.

Storm debris-related collection is ongoing countywide and is separate from regularly scheduled curbside pickups. Storm debris includes trees, branches, shrubs and other vegetation that was downed during Hurricane Irma. It also includes downed fencing, flooring, furniture, wallboard and other debris that had to be removed from homes due to structural damage or flooding. Specially hired debris-removal contractors – not households' regular haulers – are in Lee County to handle storm debris.

Unlike the last direct-hit hurricane here – 2004's fast-and-narrow Hurricane Charley – Hurricane Irma impacted a broader area of the county and its duration in Lee was longer. Its track inland through Lee – rather than along the coast – also created circumstances that make post-storm debris removal challenging.

"We understand people are frustrated and want us to remove storm debris quickly," Lee County Manager Roger Desjarlais said. "Although the county was ready pre-storm with debris-removal contracts in place, we've encountered post-Irma challenges and are working toward solutions."

Among the challenges:

- Contractor shortages: Debris-removal contractors are a specialized service and many of them had allocated resources to Hurricane Harvey, which hit Texas on Aug. 25. Also, Irma impacted nearly the entire state of Florida, causing resource allocation issues.
- Staging areas: The county pre-selected seven debris-staging areas prior to Irma's landfall, which was anticipated to be coastal as hurricanes typically are. However, the storm's eastern path through Lee rendered four staging sites unusable due to flooding.
- Extensive standing water: Contractors initially experienced delays into areas due to flood water; also contractors experienced some equipment damage when navigating receding waters.

Lee County is addressing these challenges, and while resolving them it also is preparing how to avoid them with future storms. "There is no schedule for when storm debris will be collected from your neighborhood, but be assured that it will," Desjarlais said.

For more information about Solid Waste collections and debris collections, see the Frequently Asked Questions below.

FAQs: Hurricane Irma clean up

As residents tackle property clean up, Lee County Solid Waste offers the following guidance to frequently asked questions.

What is the difference between storm-related debris and regular household trash?

Storm debris includes any trees, tree limbs and shrubs that went down in the hurricane. It also includes any fencing, flooring, furniture or wall board, etc. that had to be removed from the home due to flooding or other structural damage. This will be picked up by special debris-collection contractors.

Regular household trash is those things that you would throw away in a normal week with no hurricane. This will be picked up by your regular waste hauler.

When will the storm debris be collected from my curb and what should I do to prepare?

There is no definite schedule for when storm debris will be collected from your neighborhood. Additional debris collection vehicles arrive daily and are dispatched as soon as they are certified by FEMA. This cleanup effort will take months; it will not be concluded until all county neighborhoods are cleared.

You can prepare for the storm debris collection by having everything at the curb in separate piles; vegetation waste should be separate from construction debris, including furniture, appliances. If you have large amounts of leaves and small twigs in plastic bags, set those aside from any brush piles. The brush will be ground into mulch and plastic cannot be in the mulch.

When will my regular household collections resume?

All three types of household collections – garbage, recycling and normal weekly yard waste – will resume on regular collection days the week of Sept. 25.

You can help speed the cleanup by placing yard waste that is in compliance out for weekly collection by your regular hauler. This includes yard waste that is bagged, bundled and tied, or in containers. Each bag, bundle or container needs to weigh less than 50 pounds. Bundles need to be less than six feet. Palm fronds can be stacked in neat piles at the curb.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on proper set out, go to www.leegov.com/solidwaste/residential

The Lee County Solid Waste Division is a nationally-recognized enterprise system providing residents and businesses safe, affordable waste disposal and recycling services. The system uses an energy-from-waste combustion process to create clean, renewable energy and single-stream recycling for material recovery. For more information visit www.leegov.com/solidwaste