

Guidelines for Tornado Debris Cleanup in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Buffers

April, 2011

The tornados that struck North Carolina on April 16, 2011 left fallen and damaged trees in the piedmont and coastal plain. Some of the damage occurred in the protected Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Buffers, but a variety of exemptions in the Buffer Rules allow for removal of trees and other storm debris without having to obtain verbal or written permission from the Division of Water Quality. These exemptions include:

- Removal of debris.
- Emergency fire control measures provided that topography is restored.
- Pruning forest vegetation. The rules require that normal pruning should be done in a way that does not compromise the health and function of the forest vegetation. DWQ will assume that trimming needed to remove storm-damaged tree branches or trim other storm-damaged vegetation is allowable.
- Removal of individual trees which are in danger of causing damage to dwellings, other structures or human life
- Construction of temporary roads that disturb less than or equal to 2,500 square feet provided that vegetation is restored within six months of initial disturbance

DWQ will interpret these exemptions broadly to allow foresters, municipalities, homeowners and their contractors to quickly complete cleanup of tornado debris in the impacted areas. Property owners are not expected to re-plant trees in buffer areas affected by the storms, but exposed areas need to be stabilized to avoid erosion. As long as the ground is stabilized, natural succession of trees should occur. The exemptions are comprehensive and allow for cleanup of damaged areas in the path of the storms, including use of mechanized equipment. If heavy equipment is used or temporary roads constructed, those activities need to avoid creation of new ditches or other features that would drain water through the buffer and into the adjoining surface waters. If a landowner has questions about the application of these exemptions to a specific site, the Division's regional offices should be contacted:

- Raleigh RO: 919-791-4200
 - Counties: Chatham, Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Johnston, Lee, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake, Warren, Wilson
- Washington RO: 252-946-6481
 - Counties: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Greene, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, Washington, Wayne
- Wilmington RO: 910-796-7215
 - Counties: Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender
- DWQ Central Office, Raleigh: 919-807-6300

In addition to these exemptions, there is an allowable use for protection of structures, facilities and streambanks if *additional disturbance* of the riparian buffer or stream channel is required. This use would require written approval from DWQ. These will be handled by the Division's regional offices and will be turned around within 48 hours. Also, any additional impacts to wetlands and streams beyond the scope of the Buffer Rules, including use of heavy equipment

in wetlands, may require coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps' Regulatory Field Offices can be reached at:

- Raleigh: 919-554-4884
- Washington: 910-251-4555 (Yes, this is a 910 area code)
- Wilmington: 910-251-4633