



HURRICANE

Wanna wait longer for that pile of Irma debris to be picked up? Throw trash into it.

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How does a big mess grow even bigger? It's happening throughout South Florida as careless, clueless residents throw trash onto post-Irma debris piles, adding to the eyesore and complicating the cleanup process.

Mattresses, chairs, bookshelves, swimming pool noodles, planters, tires, air conditioning filters and various other items of junk litter the sides of streets that have already been turned into cluttered corridors by the mounds of tree branches and dying foliage left in Hurricane Irma's wake.

Residents who have ignored instructions by their municipality or Miami-Dade County to refrain from dumping trash until bulk pickup resumes not only make their neighborhoods uglier but slow down debris removal crews who have to sort through the piles.

ADVERTISING



Baby cribs, artificial Christmas trees, suitcases, patio furniture cushions — none of those things can go through the chippers that grind yard waste into mulch. Yet all those things can be found on swales right now. Cities, debris clearing workers and neighbors are begging people not to leave their stuff outside.

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Furniture is trash and shouldn't be deposited on piles of post-Irma debris.

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"There's a big delay in collection if we have to be separating trash from the veggies," said Marvin Mondragon of H&J Asphalt, who was clearing debris on Crawford Avenue in Coconut Grove on Friday. "We can do our job faster and smoother if we can focus on our priority, which is veggies. Wow, it took us almost two weeks to clean a little section of Little Havana because we had to sort through so much junk."

Crews are not allowed to pick up debris mixed with trash, are discouraged from sorting and are being told to bypass those piles.

"If a contractor sees trash he will keep going," city of Miami spokesman Rick Seara said. "If they see an old desk or bedroom set, they have been instructed to go on by."

Bulk trash pickup has been suspended in most areas. Until it resumes, residents are advised to wait or use a dump. Miami residents can use the city dump at 1290 NW 20th Street.

“The crews are not going to waste any more time picking through and moving stuff,” said Patrick Tillman, a debris monitor for the city. “Do you care about the appearance of your house or your block? If you put your stuff out, it’s going to sit there for awhile.”

And rot.

“It looks horrible, and people complain, but these guys are working 12 hours a day and they are not janitors,” said Kathy Kesler of Coconut Grove, who went to the trouble of culling plastic, paper and trash items from a pile on her street so it would be picked up. “The message is that everybody needs to be patient and help out.

“Don’t use this as a time to clean out your house. Don’t be a litterbug tossing 7-Eleven cups, potato chip bags, water bottles and dog poop bags on debris piles. It’s so stinky and it’s going to get worse every day.”

Drive-by dumpers are also a problem.

Lots and lots of Amazon shipping boxes, plastic garbage bags, inflatable pool toys, swingsets, fencing rubble, lamps, cat scratching posts, bikes, bean bag chairs — who knew there were so many bean bag chairs? — cannot be discarded with Irma debris.

Throwing inappropriate items into piles can harm workers.

“A piece of steel was placed within one of the debris piles that we collected,” Coral Gables warned on its website. “This caused our chipping equipment to malfunction and could have caused severe injuries to one of our workers. This is why it is so important to NOT mix the debris piles with other materials.

“If you want your debris piles to be collected, only put landscape/vegetative material in debris piles. Please DO NOT place non-vegetative junk or trash out such as broken furniture on the swales until further notice. This will only create an additional nuisance in your neighborhood.”

Debris removal also has to be completed and documented correctly or cities won’t get reimbursed for the expense by FEMA. Coral Gables spent \$10 million on Hurricane Katrina debris removal and \$12 million on Wilma. FEMA reimbursed the city 100 percent for both.

Coral Gables has 80 trucks out collecting and transporting debris to three staging areas and has processed 140,000 cubic yards of an expected total of 200,000 in the first stage of removal.

It’s estimated that Irma left 100 million cubic yards of debris throughout the state, enough to fill 700 football stadiums. Miami-Dade, handling pickup for 11 cities and its unincorporated areas, will pick up 3 million cubic yards. Fort Lauderdale is projecting 1 million cubic yards.

So sit on that old bean bag chair for now and throw it out later.



A worker in Biscayne Park operates a large excavator on top of a mountain of debris. Emily Michot - emichot@miamiherald.com