

# TBM ash-out crew offers hope in Colorado

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The East Troublesome Fire in Colorado consumed more than 190,000 acres, 366 homes and about 200 other buildings. In its wake, thousands of people were left wondering what to do in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.



TBM volunteers work to clear the sites of homes destroyed by the East Troublesome Fire in Colorado. (Photo by Sabrina Pinales)

Seven months later, many were still stuck when 10 Texas Baptist Men volunteers arrived in Grand County, Colo., through an effort organized by Colorado Baptist Disaster Relief.

Dressed in Tyvek suits and N95 masks to clear trash and debris, the TBM team sifted through the charred remains of homes belonging to people still struggling to pick up the pieces.

“It was mostly all ash,” said team leader Sabrina Pinales, TBM ministry advancement coordinator.

“But occasionally, you’d run into a spoon or fork and you’d know you were working in their kitchen area. It kind of hit you hard in that moment: This is where they used to live. This is where they used to eat. This belonged to them.”

## **Struck by the magnitude of the devastation**

The team cleared seven properties, making it possible for teams to help people take the next steps in the recovery process. All the structures were classified as total losses, with many owners still determining how to move forward, as the properties had been uninsured or underinsured.

“Just to see the magnitude, as far as what the fire did, is humbling,” said team member Jerry Hall. “It was just amazing—the devastation of these homes, how fast the fire spread. I think one of the homeowners told us that the winds around his home had been clocked at 100 miles an hour during the fire.”

Meeting homeowners put faces to need for the volunteers, driving home the importance of ash-out relief work, Hall said.

“In the case of the gentleman with the mobile home park, he had been working on this by himself for a year, and he was not very far along in the process,” Hall said. “He was just overcome, so we could come in there with the team and give him some hope. He’s still got a long way to go to recover from that, but at least there was some hope for him.”

The sheer magnitude of devastation initially felt overwhelming to the TBM volunteers, as well, Pinales said.

“Walking in, we weren’t sure we could do all this,” Pinales said. “Then we got our heads together, prayed and got to work. By the end of the day, we

completed so much more and accomplished so much more than we ever thought possible. It was a matter of just persevering.”

## **Putting faith into action**

For Donna Trimble, TBM’s ash-out mission presented an opportunity to put faith into action. Trimble said she prayed God would assemble the right team and opportunities to share God’s love through the volunteers’ work.

In addition to manual labor, the TBM crew gave a Bible to one of the homeowners, in which the team members had noted some of their favorite Scriptures and written encouraging words.

“Last year, God had really burdened me to pray for the fire control and for people who lost stuff during that time,” Trimble said.

“One of the main reasons I went was because God had impressed that on my heart, and I felt like I could finally do something besides praying for them.”