

## Combating Illegal Dumping

### What is Illegal Dumping?

Illegal dumping is a crime wherein violators deposit used tires, construction debris, old appliances, furniture, and general household, commercial and industrial wastes in places other than permitted facilities such as landfills and transfer stations. The garbage is usually dumped on vacant lots, along utility right-of-ways, public and private lands, and at other normally unattended locations.

### Reasons for Illegal Dumping

While communities may experience illegal dumping for a variety of reasons, the following are considered common causes for illegal dumping:

- lack of convenient legal alternatives and presence of convenient illegal disposal sites;
- increasing disposal costs;
- lack of public awareness of the issue; and
- lack of judicial understanding of environmental laws, and therefore, low fines.

### Why is Illegal Dumping a Problem?

Illegal dumps diminish the quality of life and livability of the region. Illegal dumping of trash, garbage, discarded appliances, old barrels, used tires, furniture, yard debris, oil, antifreeze and pesticides can threaten human health, wildlife and the environment. Dumps can pollute local waterways and groundwater or cause injury to children playing in or around the dumps. Tires become breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other noxious insects. Some dumps become home to rodents. Illegal dumps depress the value of surrounding land and neighborhoods.

### Laws against Illegal Dumping

In addition to Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS 164.775, ORS 164.785, and ORS 164.805) many local jurisdictions have ordinances against illegal dumping and littering.

### Who is Responsible for Enforcement?

DEQ responses to complaints about illegal dumping are generally limited to illegal landfill complaints and waste tire piles in excess of 100 tires. DEQ will normally refer complaints about offensive littering or solid waste "nuisance" conditions to the county or the incorporated city or town in which the problem is reported if that city or county has a designated individual to respond to the complaint.

Generally, an illegal landfill can be defined as an area where large volumes of solid waste have

been disposed of and where a real threat to human health and the environment is suspected. Examples might include sites that have large volumes of waste or contain more hazardous waste types or are near or in water ways or are easy for the public to access. Such landfills often times are established by individuals receiving waste for profit.

### Funding

Finding funds to develop and implement a comprehensive illegal dumping program isn't always easy and each community has to identify the strategies that fit best with their local resources. Most projects involving illegal dumping require individuals, businesses, and government agencies to team together to accomplish cleanup strategies. The local government may be able to fund the costs with fees built into the local garbage rates but may rely on community volunteers to plan the project and provide site support. A good, ongoing public awareness campaign can help minimize illegal dumping and compensate for a lack of staffing or resources. Therefore, the suggestions below are offered to help you start brainstorming ideas that are appropriate for your community and its pocket book.

### Community-Based Strategies for Cleaning Up Sites

#### 1) Public Awareness Campaigns

The following are some of the tasks that can be used by communities to develop a public awareness campaign. These tasks can be modified to fit your community since every community is different and no one process will fit all communities. Example "Tips" for citizens and property owners are also provided.

- Identify your target audience (e.g. general public, school-aged children, construction companies)
- Define your objective and your message (e.g. stop forest land dumping, construction debris dumping, general dumping)
- Identify available funds (e.g. Where do we find the money? Can we stretch our dollars by using Public Service Announcements?)
- Identify the mechanisms/tools to deliver your message (e.g. newspaper ads, press releases, radio messages)
- Develop a schedule to implement your campaign (e.g. schedule to create and produce materials, schedule to present materials,



State of Oregon  
Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

Land Quality Division  
Solid Waste Policy &  
Program Development  
811 SW 6th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204  
Phone: (503) 229-6738  
(800) 452-4011  
Fax: (503) 229-5850  
Contact: Martine Roberts-  
Pillon  
[www.oregon.gov/DEQ/](http://www.oregon.gov/DEQ/)

budget schedule)

- Obtain support from management, elected officials, other public agencies (e.g. city/county commissioners, police, public health, solid waste departments)
- Implement campaign (e.g. distribute materials, run ads and announcements)
- Evaluate success of the campaign and report results (e.g. Have dumping practices changed over a certain period of time? Provide report to both citizens and public officials)
- Modify campaign based on evaluation (e.g. Target a different audience? Utilize different media?)
- Start the process all over again!

### **Public Awareness “Tips” for Citizens**

Law enforcement personnel are not the only people who can put an end to littering and illegal dumping. Citizens can take an active role in putting an end to these crimes by teaming up with local officials.

- Always dispose of your own litter properly by closing dumpster lids. If the dumpster has no lid, place debris in bags and secure with ties before depositing in a dumpster. Otherwise, it might blow away.
- Do not transport unsecured debris in the back of your own vehicle. If it blows out, it becomes litter.
- Spread the word to friends and neighbors that illegal dumping is a crime.
- If you participate in the neighborhood watch program, add to your list of suspicious activities trash laden pickup trucks cruising the neighborhood.
- Write or call your local or county elected officials and let them know that litter and illegal dumping in your community is a major concern.
- Organize volunteer cleanups of illegal dump sites. People are not as likely to litter an area that is clean.
- Invite your local officials to speak to your neighborhood association or other organizations about illegal dumping in your area.
- If you are having construction or remodeling work done, ask where the debris is being taken and ask for a disposal receipt.
- If you have property that gets dumped on, close off access and post "No Dumping" signs.
- Don't dispose of yard debris near streams or lakes. The extra nutrients from the debris pollute the water and rob oxygen needed by stream life.
- If you witness illegal dumping, report it immediately to your local law enforcement agency. Try to get a license plate number.
- Report dump sites (after the fact) to your local

solid waste or health department.

### **Public Awareness Campaign “Tips” for Property Owners**

Illegal dumping at businesses, apartment buildings and other private property is a serious problem. Some dumpers are individuals or businesses that dump in your dumpster to avoid paying for garbage service. Others haul junk for a small fee and then dump the loads illegally. Illegal dumpers often use the same sites over and over. If you have been a victim of illegal dumping, take the following measures to avoid further problems:

- Clean up. Any site with an old tire or a bag of trash tends to act as a magnet for additional trash. Keep sites such as parking lots and areas around dumpsters neat and clean.
- Post signs. Install signs to let potential dumpers know that unauthorized dumping is a violation of local and state ordinances and that they risk being identified and prosecuted.
- Install lights. Most dumping occurs at night when dumpers are least likely to be seen. Installing motion sensor lighting around waste containers and in parking lots will eliminate the factor dumpers depend on the most to avoid detection -darkness!
- Use vehicle barriers. In some cases, it may be feasible to place waste containers behind a barrier (such as a steel post) that prevents vehicles from driving up to the containers. The barrier is removed only for scheduled pickup by your waste hauler.
- Lock up. Lock your dumpster lid or secure it behind an enclosure to deter small scale dumpers looking for an accessible container.

### **2) Organize a Community Cleanup**

Annual, or semi-annual, cleanup days can be successful in ridding communities of the type of trash which is illegally disposed of along dirt roads, over cliffs, and in streambeds. Some public or private landfill operators may lower or cancel the cost of taking a load of garbage to the landfill during a cleanup event. This encourages citizens to properly dispose of materials at the same time it offers a sound alternative to illegal dumping. Most community cleanup days are held in the spring or fall, when residents are doing heavy-duty cleaning, and when renters are most likely to be moving. Contact SOLV (contact information listed on page 3) for information on how to plan a cleanup or for volunteer coordinator training.

### **3) Host Special Item Collection Events**

Special item collection events focus on collecting one specific type of a hard to dispose or recycle item. Because options for disposing or



recycling these items are limited, they typically end up dumped on forest land or along roadsides. Examples are tires, appliances, furniture, and household hazardous waste. Arrangements are made in advance of the special collection event for the final reuse, recycling, or disposition of the items.

#### **4) Implement Adopt-a-Dump, River, Neighborhood or Street Programs**

Similar to the "Adopt-A-Highway" program organized by the Oregon Department of Transportation, an "Adopt" program provides a group of interested persons a structure to conduct the cleanup of an illegal dump, a river or stream, a neighborhood or street. Adopt groups can be organized by individuals, interest groups such as neighborhood associations, or local government entities such as public works or road departments.

Adopt programs can be more successful in generating a larger base of community participation. The primary functions of the organizing body or coordinator are to: (1) recruit and train volunteers; (2) arrange a mechanism for disposing of the trash (e.g. a drop box located at the site and bags for trash); (3) publicize the cleanup activity (e.g. post a sign at a dump site or along a neighborhood road).

Cleanups can be conducted as often as is necessary, or on a more set schedule such as twice a year or even quarterly.

It may also be helpful to contact your local county or city road department, or your local Chamber of Commerce for ideas on establishing an "Adopt-A-Dump, River, Neighborhood, or Street" program.

#### **Enforcement Programs**

Deterring and enforcing on illegal dumpers requires a comprehensive public awareness campaign and enforcement program. To be effective, your jurisdiction will need a legal mechanism in place such as a local ordinance. A model illegal dumping ordinance is available from DEQ in a separate fact sheet.

Your program will need to identify staff for investigating sites and violators. It also takes a judicial system willing to enforce the laws and levy meaningful and appropriate fines.

Information must also be provided to inform the public of legal disposal options, why illegal dumping is a crime and what the consequences will be if they are caught dumping. An effective public awareness program will deter violators: the threat will become the enforcement.

#### **Need Assistance?**

**SOLV** is a non-profit organization that offers a number of resources to support cleanup programs and projects in your community including planning assistance, project materials, site support (small grants) and recognition.

SOLV also offers special training for Volunteer Coordinators of community cleanup projects.

More information can be found on their website at <http://www.solv.org> or by calling SOLV at 503-844-9571 or 1-800-333-SOLV (7658).

We also encourage you to telephone the DEQ Solid Waste Program staff person in your area for more assistance:

DEQ Pendleton Office: (541) 298-4063  
DEQ Salem Office - (503) 378-8240  
DEQ Medford Office - (541) 776-6010  
DEQ Eugene Office - (541) 686-7838  
DEQ Bend Office (541) 388-6146  
DEQ NW Region Office - (503) 229-5263  
DEQ The Dalles Office - (541) 298-7255

#### **Alternative formats**

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications & Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, x5696.

