

Proper Recycling & Waste Management

Illegal Dumping

A Guide to Doing it right in Lawrence and Mercer Counties

What is Illegal Dumping?

Illegal dumping is the dumping of waste illegally along roadways, in waterways, and other areas not authorized to accept it. It is often called fly dumping, open dumping, or scattering rubbish. It impacts rural, suburban, and urban communities.

How Widespread of a Problem is Illegal Dumping in Lawrence and Mercer Counties?

Past assessments of illegal dumping in Lawrence and Mercer counties recorded more than 100 sites in Lawrence County and 140 in Mercer County. It is estimated that there are many more sites that exist. Past assessments only recorded information about sites that were visible from the roadways.

Why does it Happen?

Reasons people have cited to for illegal dumping include to avoid paying for trash/disposal or a lack of services for hard-to-dispose items such as bulky waste or potentially hazardous materials such as electronics.

Construction and demolition waste is a common component of illegal dump areas, the result of contractors and do-it-yourselfers trying to avoid paying for proper disposal.

What types of Materials are Illegally Dumped?

Hard-to-dispose and bulky items are waste materials such as mattresses, tires, electronics, furniture, and appliances that are not readily accepted in curbside trash collection. Not surprisingly, these materials are major components of illegal dump sites and areas. Construction and demolition waste is another common waste type found in illegal dump areas.

Why is Illegal Dumping a Problem?

Illegal dumping is a serious problem for communities. It impacts the environment, our health, social attitudes, property values, and is a significant financial stress to municipal budgets. Many municipalities lack the financial and/or enforcement capacity to adequately address this problem.

Environmental Issues

Many of the items frequently dumped contain toxic materials or are hazardous themselves. This includes TVs, electronics, paints, and household chemicals. Liquids in particular pose an immediate threat to the soil and water. Occasionally some sites are set on fire leading to air pollution.

Health and Safety Issues

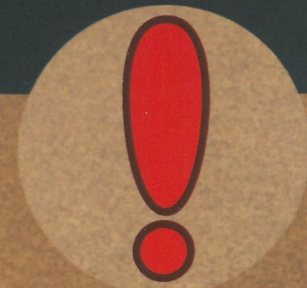
Sharp edges, protruding nails/screws, and broken glass all pose direct physical threats to human health. Some sites contain syringes, which are a special concern. Organic materials attract vermin that carry disease. Mosquitoes are attracted to the water that accumulates in illegally dumped trash, tires in particular. Mosquitoes spread several serious illnesses such as encephalitis (caused by West Nile Virus) and dengue fever.

Social Issues

Illegal dumping often generates apathy and hopelessness. Because illegally dumped trash is associated with a lack of concern for an area, it can attract additional dumping and other crimes.

Economic Issues

Trash is much cheaper to dispose of correctly as opposed to picking it up after it has been illegally dumped. Two decades worth of data in our counties has consistently shown that it costs between \$600 to \$900 per ton to pick up illegally dumped trash - versus an average of \$45/ton to do it right the first time. PennDOT spends roughly \$14 million annually on litter efforts and this does not include resources spent by county, local, and other government agencies.



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How can We Address Illegal Dumping?

There are many tools that can be used to tackle the problem.

Trash and Recycling Program Design

A well designed trash and recycling program that includes bulky and hard-to-dispose item collection will provide people with opportunities to properly dispose of many difficult materials. Adding the collection of electronics and household hazardous waste to a program helps to enhance it and reduce the chance of these materials contaminating the environment and jeopardizing our health.

Mandatory participation and payment is a vital part of a good program.

Hiring a Legitimate General Hauler

Those hiring a hauler to clean out their house should hire someone with at least their name and phone number on both sides of their truck. Also, expect to pay more because legitimate haulers will take the trash to a permitted landfill or transfer station.

Be wary of haulers that "accept" some items such as tires, televisions, or chemicals. These are expensive items to manage properly.

Be skeptical of any deal that seems much cheaper than your other options and always pay with a check and demand a receipt. This is helpful if the trash is illegally dumped and traced back to you.

Hiring a Legitimate Contractor for your Construction Project

Construction/demolition waste is a major component of illegally dumped waste. This is often the result of a contractor trying to save money or underbid another contractor.

Many contractors use roll-off boxes for waste. As with using a general hauler to clean out your basement, ask where the debris is being taken and always demand a receipt. Keep in mind that it is illegal for a contractor to burn construction/demolition waste.

Enforcement

Enforcing illegal dumping and littering laws is extremely important. Enforcement can include citations, community service, picking up the debris that was dumped or a combination of all three. Pennsylvania's updated littering laws now include mandatory community service picking up litter. When these laws aren't enforced, it sends a message that this is a safe community in which to dump trash and litter. The widespread availability of surveillance cameras makes enforcement much easier than it was years ago.

Limiting Access

In some areas, illegal dumping can be prevented by placing barriers, trees, fencing, and gates.

Cleanups and Volunteering

Illegally dumped trash must be picked up at some point. Many municipalities frequently clean their roadways of such debris - at taxpayer expense. Volunteering with a group that picks up trash and litter is a great way to build community pride and ownership of an area while saving taxpayers' money. Ongoing volunteer maintenance, combined with beautification, enforcement, community watches, and education is sometimes enough to stop dumping in an area.

Beautification

Clean areas tend to stay clean while areas with trash tend to attract more trash. In some situations, planting trees and flowers, when combined with volunteer cleanups help minimize illegally dumped trash.

Education

Education starts at home with parents teaching their children not to litter. Education is important at all levels. Many people don't realize the damage caused by illegal dumping to their health, environment, and community.

Download our other fact sheets to learn more about hiring a hauler and how to properly dispose or recycle many hard-to-dispose items.



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