



SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

2020-2021

ILLEGAL DUMPING: IS THERE A SOLUTION?

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I. SUMMARY

Illegal dumping has long been a problem of significant concern to the residents of Solano County. The 2020-2021 Solano County Civil Grand Jury has found that there are no complete and final solutions to the issue of illegal dumping. However, public awareness and development of a cooperative action plan may improve the overall approach to the mitigation of illegal dumping. The Civil Grand Jury found that the county and the cities all have the same basic definition of illegal dumping and nearly all agreed that it is a continuing problem. One of the significant contributing factors is insufficient enforcement staff funding. This report includes numerous avenues that are being pursued, such as working closely with garbage services, organizing volunteer groups to pick up litter, and programs for local schools to educate students on the importance of protecting our environment.

II. INTRODUCTION

Illegal dumping of trash, construction waste, furniture, hazardous materials and more, has been and will continue to be a problem here in Solano County. This is true in most urban and suburban areas around the state and the country as a whole. There is no single comprehensive solution that will eliminate this problem entirely. But there are steps that the cities and the county can take to mitigate and lessen the effects of illegal dumping throughout the county.

The Civil Grand Jury confirmed through its investigation that the responsibility to address the issue tended to fall under the purview of the Public Works departments of the cities, and the county itself for unincorporated areas. This investigation involved the review of city and county ordinances and enforcement challenges, as well as interviews with city and county officials. The data and responses collected led the Civil Grand Jury to conclude that the cities and the county have many similar mitigation approaches, but some unique differences as well.

III. METHODOLOGY

Interviewed:

- City of Benicia Administration
- City of Fairfield Administration
- City of Rio Vista Administration
- City of Vacaville Administration
- City of Dixon Administration
- City of Vallejo Administration
- City of Suisun City Administration
- Solano County Administration

Reviewed:

Turning the Tide on Trash, Vallejo Times-Herald, March 6, 2021
Valle Vista 'Junkyard' Gets Police Attention, Times Herald, February 16, 2021
Adopt-A-Street Agreement, City of Fairfield, City Manager's Office
Fairfield Daily Republic Articles:
Supes Introduce Formalized Nuisance Ordinance, March 24, 2021
Vacaville Launches Homeless Work-for-Pay Program, March 19, 2021
Free Community Drop-Off Day on Tap for Suisun Residents, April 12, 2021
Green Valley Group Schedules Wildfire Prevention Cleanup Day, April 25, 2021
Code Enforcement Removes 22 Tons of Debris from Fairfield Home, February 6, 2021

Requested and Received Information From:

Solano Transportation Authority
City of Benicia Administration
City of Fairfield Administration
City of Rio Vista Administration
City of Dixon Administration
City of Vacaville Administration
City of Vallejo Administration
Solano County Administration
City of Suisun City Administration

Websites:

<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>
<https://ci.benicia.com>
<https://www.fairfield.ca.gov>
<https://www.cityofdixon.us>
<https://www.ci.vacaville.ca.us>
<https://www.cityofvallejo.net>
<https://www.suisun.com>
<https://www.solanocounty.com>
<https://www.riovistacity.com>
<https://sta.ca.gov>

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

A. Definition of Illegal Dumping

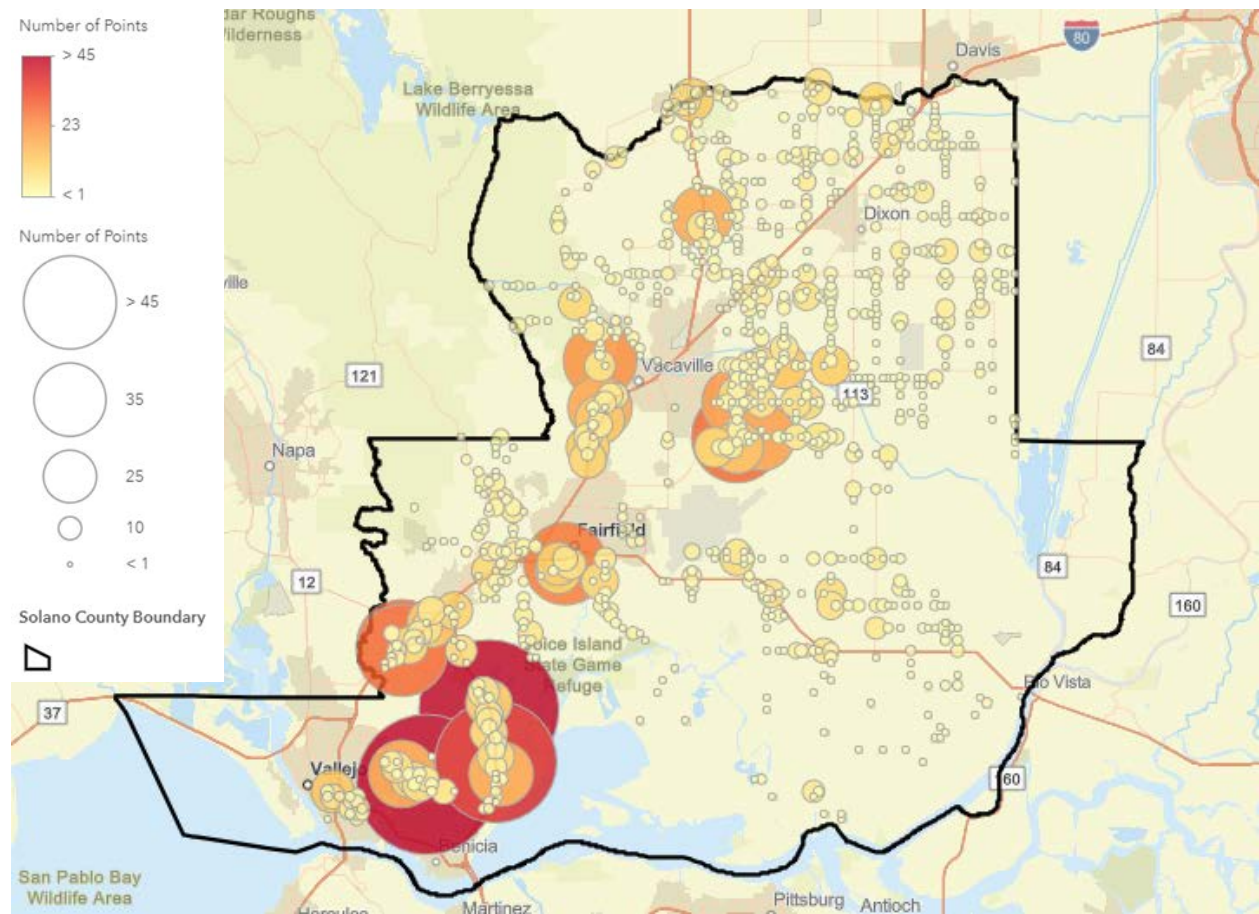
Illegal dumping is defined by California Penal Code section 374.3(a) and includes all forms of waste matter that are disposed of on public property or on private property without the owner's consent. Illegal waste disposal occurs on highways, in public parks or on other properties that are not designated for the purpose of waste disposal. The materials disposed of can be anything from a fast-food wrapper tossed on the side of the road to a truckload of materials dumped by a private

citizen or commercial hauler. For the purposes of this report, we focused on discarded trash or refuse on public property.

B. Scope of the Problem

According to Solano County Administration, the dumping problem throughout the county ebbs and flows with the economy. As the economy declines illegal dumping grows. Homelessness has a large impact on the illegal dumping problem but that issue is beyond the scope of this report. Solano County Public Works Department reported to the Civil Grand Jury that 60.07 tons of illegally dumped household waste were disposed of at landfills in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-2019. For FY 2019-2020 the figure was 132.76 tons and for FY 2020-2021 the figure is 30.52 tons as of, 1/15/2021, which represents only half of the current fiscal year.

The figure below is a visual representation of the incidents of illegal dumping known to have occurred throughout the county as provided by the Solano County Public Works Department. It depicts the location and number of roadside dumping sites (“Points”) in unincorporated Solano County cleaned up by Solano County Public Works from December 1, 2019 through March 17, 2021.



C. Local Enforcement

All of the cities in Solano County as well as the county itself have established ordinances to address a variety of illegal dumping issues. However, the cities have limited resources available to enforce those ordinances. They each have established monetary penalties that can be enforced if the perpetrators are caught. However, code enforcement personnel available to respond to instances of illegal dumping is a limited resource and presents a challenge for most cities and the county to stay on top of the problem. A limited number of staff members are available to patrol the city streets and outlying areas where dumping is prevalent on any sort of regular basis.

The county Public Works Department has partnered with the Sheriff's Office to assist in enforcement. Cities have sought assistance from their local police and fire departments to enforce local ordinances. Yet, the problem remains a challenge.

D. Strategies Implemented

One city's approach to the challenge of identifying illegal dumping has been to strategically place mobile cameras at "hot spot" dumping sites and move them to different locations as needed. As the cost of this technology declines, this option becomes more reasonable and accessible.

Another city has 8-10 fixed cameras placed in known illegal dumping "hot spots". A code enforcement officer follows up, then issues a police report and sends the report to the city attorney to determine if enough evidence is found to file a complaint. In the past two years, 26 complaints were filed by the city attorney. Only one other city reported that complaints were filed for ordinance infractions.

In the course of this investigation, the Civil Grand Jury was advised that one example of a "hot spot" was on the road leading to one of the landfill sites in the county. During one of the interviews a possible explanation was offered, which pointed to a combination of the cost of the fees and impatience with waiting in line to make a drop off. The Civil Grand Jury inquired as to the prevalence of this practice, but was told that no specific data on this type of incident was available as it is not being actively tracked.

Although none of the cities or the county have established budget line-items specifically targeted for the mitigation of illegal dumping issues, they all do recognize the effect on their budgets and include estimates of the cost of mitigation in their budgeting processes. The county, for example, explained that they track the costs to address roadside dumping (staff time, materials, disposal fees) during each fiscal year and include estimates of the cost of mitigation in their budgeting processes for the subsequent fiscal year. The cities, for their part, similarly have their costs absorbed into the departments that are directly involved in the pickup or enforcement of cleanup, such as public works and public safety. With no budget specifically established to deal with this issue, it is unlikely that expansion of camera usage will occur unless the cities allocate funds for this purpose.

E. Public Awareness

City websites are a resource of information relating to trash collection services available through their contracted service provider. Many citizens are unaware of services other than the weekly standard pickup at the curb. Each city's contract with their provider is unique and has been negotiated on behalf of the residents. The website of local waste management providers generally includes a list and explanation of additional services provided under these contracts. An example of an additional service is the bulk pickup of mattresses, tires, hazardous waste material, appliances and other electronics. Local service providers may also include additional information in customer billing statements.

F. City Sponsorship and Support

Several cities are proactive at sponsoring and/or supporting various programs and events for cleanup. These programs and events are designed to provide public awareness and encourage community participation. Some examples are:

- Free Neighborhood Dumpster Program
This program provides a dumpster in a neighborhood for street and exterior cleanup. Applicants must apply through the city and allow 6-8 weeks for processing the request due to the limited number of dumpsters available.
- Earth Day
Earth Day occurs in Spring each year.
- Coastal Cleanup
This program is among the largest volunteer events in the US. Community members collect and document trash picked up along coastlines and waterways.
- Neighborhood Cleanup Days
This program in one Solano County city is sponsored twice a year. Areas that needed cleanup are targeted and the city staff volunteer as well as local residents. The local service provider drops off dumpsters in designated areas.
- Free Dump Passes
The waste management service providers for several cities provide free passes to the dump for its residents.
- Adopt-A-Street Program
This program is sponsored by the city, businesses and residents. Groups adopt an area and keep streets, sidewalks and storm drains clean. Volunteers watch a safety video and are provided gloves, bags and pickers to use as they collect waste discarded in the streets.
- Litter Pickers
This is a volunteer group that periodically holds cleanup days for the city. Participants are provided with safety vests, pickers and garbage bags. They pick up litter as a team or as individuals.

When community residents get involved in programs like these, their cities benefit. Streets are cleaner and the environment benefits by preventing trash and other debris from entering our

drain systems and waterways, preventing harm to wildlife and giving residents a sense of pride in having clean streets.

G. Education

During the interviews, it was stated that education of our children has become an important factor in keeping our environment clean. At an early age, children learn environmental conservation through the actions of their parents and other influential adults. They learn the right way to be respectful of the environment. However, when cigarette butts, fast-food wrappers and other waste items are carelessly tossed out onto the street or anywhere not designated for trash, children are wrongly led to believe that this is normal and appropriate behavior.

Our schools can play a vital role in educating students on important environmental issues. For example:

- One city's wastewater treatment plant subsidizes ecology and life cycle classes. Students are educated as to how pollution, litter and illegal dumping can harm the planet.
- One city's recycle program is promoted by local Soroptimist, Rotary and other service organizations.
- One city offers after school programs sponsored through their Public Works Department. These programs teach recycling as well as keeping streets and public places clean.
- One school district has high school students participate in campus cleanup as an educational event.
- One city's waste contractor provides information to the schools on recycling.

Several cities provide additional conservation information through their service bills. One city promotes a "Take Back" program for disposing of unused medications so the medication does not get into our water. Others promote their recycling programs through service provider billing statements.

H. Sharing Information

There are opportunities for our cities to share ideas and work together to benefit from each of their successes in dealing with illegal dumping in their communities. The county as a whole can benefit by bringing these entities together on a regular basis to communicate new ideas, brainstorm, identify new challenges and address future actions to mitigate this challenging problem.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1 – Some residents of the county are not aware of the full range of services provided by their local waste disposal service provider.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - Recommend cities have a prominent link on their website that lists services provided by their local waste disposal service provider along with contact information.

FINDING 2 - The cities within Solano County each have varying strategies that are not currently being shared. Sharing best practices among jurisdictions is itself a best practice.

RECOMMENDATION 2A - Promote coordination between the cities in Solano County to share their issues and solutions for the illegal dumping issue within the County.

RECOMMENDATION 2B - Establish regular, ongoing communication amongst Public Works and Public Safety departments to share illegal dumping cleanup solutions.

COMMENTS

REQUIRED RESPONSES (ALL FINDINGS)

Solano County Public Works Director
City of Benicia Public Works Director
City of Fairfield Public Works Director
City of Rio Vista Public Works Director
City of Suisun City Public Works Director
City of Dixon Public Works Director
City of Vallejo Public Works Director
City of Vacaville Public Works Director

COURTESY COPIES

Solano County Board of Supervisors