

LAND

ILLEGAL ROADSIDE DUMPS

Illegal dumping of garbage is a significant problem in many rural areas of Oklahoma. Roadside dumps are ugly and can be a health threat to rural citizens. Garbage dumped near flowing water can contaminate public water supplies. Some dumped materials may even filter down to ground water. Increased populations of pests such as rats, skunks, and insects are encouraged by uncontrolled dumps.

There are over 184 sites in Oklahoma where the Department of Environmental Quality officially permits disposal of solid waste. Disposal of waste anywhere else is against the law. Most communities in Oklahoma are in compliance with the law. The problem of illegal dumping occurs primarily in rural areas where regular trash pickup is not always available.

Enforcement of the laws against illegal dumping is the responsibility of County District Attorneys. Any full-time Peace Officer who witnesses illegal dumping may issue a ticket to the offender on the spot. Fines can range from \$200 to \$1,000 a day, along with the requirement to clean up the area. In addition, any private citizen who witnesses dumping can call the local D.A. and press charges against the violator. Also, two pieces of evidence, collected by a full time peace officer at an illegal dump site with a person's name and address on it (like an old envelope), can be used by the D.A. to prosecute dumpers.

The problem with enforcement of illegal dumping is that the County courts are already overburdened. Another solution to illegal dumping is to provide places for rural residents to take trash. An example of this has been working in Delaware County since 1988. The county has provided dumpsters, also called green boxes, at convenient sites for rural citizens. The green boxes are periodically emptied and the trash disposed of properly. The operation of this system is paid for with a county sales tax. Illegal dumping in Delaware County has decreased dramatically since these green boxes have been available.

There are no state funds available for the clean up of illegal roadside dumps. State law does allow counties, cities, and towns to form solid waste management districts. If approved by a vote of the people, these districts can levy and collect taxes to provide alternatives to illegal dumping for rural areas.

If you have a problem with illegal dumping on your property or if you witness illegal dumping, contact your local District Attorney. You can also organize a grass-roots movement to support a regional solid waste management district. The Board of County Commissioners can call an election to set up such a district.

Remember, roadside dumping is unsightly, unhealthy, and illegal. It is only with the cooperation of all Oklahomans that this difficult problem can be solved.

