

Your Watershed

By the Russian River Watershed Association

KEEP MENDOCINO CLEAN

It's a beautiful spring day—bright blue sky with just a few cotton candy clouds and lots of warm sunshine. You are out for a scenic “thank goodness winter is almost over” drive in the magnificent rural Mendocino County countryside, a slight breeze from the open windows gently blowing your hair.

Suddenly, your endorphins (and your car) screech to a horrifying halt. You blink your eyes repeatedly, not wanting to believe what you see. Your brain tries desperately to assimilate the disgusting sight which is in such sharp contrast to the glory of the countryside.

You have unfortunately encountered one of the all-too-familiar phenomena on our back roads—an ugly pile of illegally dumped trash—paper, plastic, cardboard, televisions, small and large appliances, even furniture.

Besides being an eyesore, dumped trash is also a potential health hazard. There can be leaking acid from old batteries, Freon from old refrigerators, and an alphabet soup of chemicals from electronics (brominated and chlorinated flame retardants, chlorinated plastic polyvinyl chloride, lead, chromium, cadmium and mercury, etc.).

In addition to polluting the soil or potentially emitting harmful volatile gases into the atmosphere, toxic chemicals from trash piles can travel down through soils to contaminate groundwater which is a source of drinking water for county residents on private wells. Rainwater can wash over and through the trash and carry contaminated water and trash into nearby ditches, streams and waterways. These trash piles also provide a potential breeding area for disease-carrying vectors, such as rats and mosquitoes.

Stop Illegal Dumping by Getting Involved:

- Report existing illegal dump sites: 707-468-9704
- Call the sheriff's non emergency number if you see someone dumping illegally: 707-463-4411.
- Discard all items legally – including unwanted appliances, mattresses, Christmas trees and vehicles. Visit: www.MendoRecycle.org to learn more.
- Organize a volunteer clean up. Contact Mendocino Solid Waste Management Authority 707-468-9704 for more information.

So when you are out on the road again next spring, hopefully you will be able to enjoy the treasure of Mendocino County's scenery without the trash!



This article was authored by Laura Barnthouse, Environmental Risk/Community Outreach Specialist with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Environmental Health Division on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.