

Your Watershed

By the Russian River Watershed Association

KEEP SONOMA 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 Sonoma 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 at least 42% of the county's population on approximately 40,000 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. Besides the potential environmental and public health hazards associated with illegal dumping, the cost of removing this debris in Sonoma County is estimated at \$250,000 per year.

KEEP SONOMA CLEAN is a new program designed to halt illegal dumping in our county and is funded through a grant from the California Integrated Waste Management Board. It is a multi-agency effort supported by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Environmental Health Division; Sonoma County Department of Transportation and Public Works; Sonoma County Sheriff's Department; Sonoma County Information Systems Department; and the California Integrated Waste Management Board.

Surveillance cameras placed at known dumping sites are being used to discourage illegal dumping. A series of high resolution pictures, clear enough to read a license plate, are taken when motion is detected at a targeted location. The Sonoma County District Attorney's office has successfully prosecuted the first case captured on camera. Bicyclists with ABC Rides are also assisting the “Keep Sonoma Clean” effort by identifying illegal dump sites encountered on their rides.

Stop Illegal Dumping by Getting Involved:

- Report existing illegal dump sites: 877-565-DUMP (3867)
- Call the police if you see someone dumping illegally.
- Discard all items legally – including unwanted appliances, mattresses, Christmas trees and vehicles. See the **Sonoma County Recycle Guide** in the AT&T Yellow Pages® under “R” for Recycling.

- Learn more: www.KeepSonomaClean.org.

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



This article was authored by Laura Barnhouse, 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.