

Illegal Roadside Dumps

Illegal garbage dumps are 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 contaminate ground water. Roadside dumps harbor vectors, such as skunks, gnats and mosquitos.

Enforcement of the laws against illegal roadside dumping is the responsibility of county sheriff. 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 sheriff's office 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 district attorney 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 became 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 sheriff's office. 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.

