

Illegal Dumping Costs Millions Annually in Contra Costa County

By Sean Tongson

By **ECT** - Nov 28, 2017



Photo by Sean Tongson

Costa County provides a wide range of scenic and natural beauty. From the many acres of wide open space, to beautiful hiking trails with panoramic views, to the serenity and activity of the Delta, to the scenery of Mount Diablo serving as a picturesque backdrop, there are an infinite number of things here in East County to admire and enjoy visually.

East County residents have been vocal as they say there is an ongoing notable visual blight problem which continues to exist throughout many parts of East Contra Costa County; littering and illegal dumping. And it is a problem that continues to persist.

"I'm passionate about it!" said Antioch resident **Beverly Knight**, who makes it a point to pick up two bags of garbage weekly at Mira Vista Park and City Park. Long tired of the litter, Knight has adopted these parks so that children and families have a clean place to play, even picking up broken glass, cigarette butts, and even birthday party confetti. "We spend millions on picking up litter, but what are we doing to prevent it?"

Stacey Frost, a resident of East County since the mid-1980's, mentioned that she has been planning to retire out of state because the littering and dumping problem has been so overwhelming.

"You cannot go anywhere in East County any longer without garbage blowing in the wind, piled in parking lots of shopping areas, abandoned piles of household furniture along back country roads and dumped in neighborhoods," said Frost. "We have so many bills being introduced and signed into law for requirements for clean air, water quality, protecting endangered plants and animals, and banning plastic bags. All of these bills and laws are to protect us and the wildlife around us from one thing; pollutants, yet one of the primary sources currently polluting our state is household garbage.

Additionally, multiple Facebook groups have now popped within the past few months up which take photographs of the blight and dumping and post them for residents to see which results in dialogue.

"I regularly get calls from constituents about illegal dumping. It's a huge problem in East County and Public Works estimates it's costing the County \$1 million dollars every year," said Supervisor **Diane Burgis**. "The Board of Supervisors will be considering a waste hauler ordinance that would create a permitting process that would allow Code Enforcement to go after illegal dumpers. I've also reached out to the garbage hauling companies, the District Attorney's office, and County staff about convening an Illegal Dumping Task Force in East County. In Antioch, Public Works says they see a variety of littering and dumping, but notes it's not just within the city, but all over the county who is dealing with similar issues. Scores of litter are often visible alongside city streets, vacant lots, empty fields, main roads and along Highway 4, particularly on the on and off-ramps and along the shoulders. Street sweepers are often utilized to clean up the mess and debris on the roadways, but within a short period of time, the litter returns."



Illegal dumping on private property along Kirker Pass. Photo provided by Stacey Frost

In Antioch, they conduct litter abatement activities explained Code Enforcement Manager **Curt Michael**.

"The City of Antioch conducts litter abatement activity through Commercial Support Services in various areas throughout the City, which results in approximately 80 garbage bags of litter removed from city streets and sidewalks each month," said Michael. "Additionally, the City of Antioch's Abatement Team removes illegally dumped junk from city streets, sidewalks, and other public areas."

According to Michael, approximately 100 cubic yards of dumped debris are removed from city property on a weekly basis. Michael notes that if less time and resources are utilized towards collecting illegally dumped garbage, the city can use those resources to focus on other things.

"Illegal dumping and littering creates a visual blight which has a negative effect on a community's quality of life," added Michael. "With less occurrences of illegal dumping and littering on city property, the Abatement Team could spend more time on graffiti abatement, abandoned shopping cart abatement, or assisting Public Works with other projects.

Countywide, \$14 million dollars annually is allotted to maintain the 363 main miles of roads and grounds in Contra Costa County. The funds are raised through a gas tax, which has been decreasing since 2009 due to the advent of more fuel efficient cars such hybrid and electric vehicles. The majority of those funds are utilized for arguably more important issues, such a pothole repair and fixing pipes.

"We see both; littering and dumping all throughout the county," said Assistant Public Works Director **Allison Knapp**. "Furniture, mattresses, refrigerators, couches, we see it all. What people also don't understand is that the trash and debris can get into our waterways, where it can affect wildlife and their habitats."

The City of Brentwood averages one to two cleans ups a month to combat littering and dumping. Brentwood Public Works have collected approximately 178 cubic yards of illegally dumped trash and debris so far this year, while street sweepers have collected approximately 1,173,000 pounds of debris from city streets. Additionally, approximately 10 cubic yards of trash has been collected this year along Marsh Creek and various other locations in partnership with volunteer groups, such as the Friends of Marsh Creek.

"Our city prides itself on keeping our surface streets, parks and city facilities clean for our amazing citizens and visitors," said Brentwood Police Lieutenant **Walter O'Grodnick**. "Over the past 12 months, we've seen a significant increase in the amount of trash and debris recovered from homeless encampments in various spots throughout the city. These clean-ups can be costly depending on the amount of trash left behind and the resources used to perform the clean-ups. The amount of time and resources used to mitigate and clean-up trash could absolutely be used in other areas, such as preventive maintenance on our surface streets, parks, and other city facilities to name a few."

The City of Oakley has a contract with the non-profit Commercial Support Services to assist with the trash and litter pickup at City parks and facilities. Much of the \$60,000 annual budget is spent servicing trash cans, although some of that is used for litter clean up, particularly during significantly windy days, where litter becomes more visible.

“Oakley residents do a good job helping to pick up litter,” said City Manager Assistant **Nancy Marquez**. “We appreciate all residents that pick up trash as they see it to help Oakley become even more litter free.”

If Antioch residents observe any illegal dumping activity or littering and wish to report it, they are encouraged to notify the Antioch Police Department at (925) 778-3911. To report any illegally dumped junk or garbage on city property, residents and businesses may contact the Code Enforcement Division at (925)779-7042, or visit the web page at:

<http://www.ci.antioch.ca.us/CityGov/CommDev/Code-Enforcement>. Antioch Police can issue a citation to any individuals that is caught illegally dumping if they witness the illegal action.

Additionally, for any volunteers or organizations interested in assisting with litter pickup or removal in Oakley, they can contact emailinfo@ci.oakley.ca.us. Vests, bags, and pickup tools will be provided by the City to volunteers who wish to participate in litter removal.

The City of Brentwood’s Public Works Department provides regular Neighborhood Cleanup Events, and more information can be found at

(<http://brentwoodca.gov/gov/pw/recycling/events.asp>), along with information from the Contra Costa Clean Water Program at <http://www.cccleanwater.org>

5