

THURSTON COUNTY LITTER CONTROL PROGRAM

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HISTORY

Prior to 1990, besides the efforts of a few fragmented volunteer groups and concerned landowners, not much was being done to attack litter and illegal dumping problems along 2,000 shoulder miles within Thurston County. In 1990 a commissioner-sponsored committee developed a Litter Control Plan and pilot program utilizing court assigned workers to clean county roadways and provide assistance to volunteers interested in cleaning up their neighborhoods. A final program was approved by the Board of Commissioners in 1991 and administered/funded through the Department of Public Works. Between 1990 and 2008, over 24,192 miles of roadway shoulders have been cleaned and 2,094,470 pounds of bagged litter have been collected. Cleanup of illegally dumped items is too varied and numerous to list but includes everything from tires, hazardous materials, appliances, furniture, car parts and abandoned vehicles, yard waste, and other household garbage.



CURRENT PROGRAM

Since 1990, participants in the Litter Control Program have changed. Adult probationary offenders from District Court were initially utilized and partial assistance was also provided by the State's Ecology Youth Corps, Juvenile Court Probation, inmates from Cedar Creek Corrections Center, and volunteers. Our current program utilizes one adult corrections 5-person crew from the Thurston County Jail that is funded 2/3 by Department of Public Works and 1/3 by a grant from the State Department of Ecology. Crew members are screened minimum custody offenders who spend half their time cleaning high traffic, high speed county roadways and half their time cleaning the I-5 and SR-101 state interchanges throughout Thurston County. In addition, our program provides assistance to volunteer groups and individuals. Besides cleaning roadway shoulders, the Adult Corrections Crew is responsible for transporting all collected bags and illegally dumped items to the Waste and Recovery Center.



BUDGET

Two thirds of the Litter Control Program budget is funded through the Department of Public Works and approximately one third is funded by a Community Litter cleanup Program grant from the State Department of Ecology. Annual expenditures include salary for a full-time Corrections Crew Supervisor. They also include payments of landfill fees and purchase of necessary supplies, i.e., litter bags, warning signs, traffic cones, gloves, hats, rain gear, grapplers, and other safety items for the adult inmate crew, and volunteer groups and individuals.

JURISDICTION

Our Litter Control Program is designed to cleanup litter and illegally dumped items within the road right-of-way along Thurston County roadways. Besides being an eyesore, harming wildlife and their habitats, litter and illegal dumping can be hazardous to the public and our crews that must constantly work on the roadway shoulders conducting surfacing, drainage, and vegetation projects. The Thurston County Environmental Health Department is responsible for handling dumping issues on private property.

PREVENTION

In April, 2002, the State Department of Ecology implemented an anti-litter/dumping campaign, "Litter and It Will Hurt." This is the first major prevention campaign since the "Don't Be A Litterbug" program during the 1960's and its focus is on enforcement. Ecology currently has a litter hotline in which people can report the license number of vehicles they see litter coming from. The license number is cross-referenced with the registered owner of the vehicle, who will get a stern letter from the Washington State Patrol. Over the years, several other strategies have been employed to combat littering and illegal dumping including



legislation requiring litter bags in automobiles (overturned in 2003 by legislature) and tarping of loads; erection of anti-litter/no dumping signs; and encouragement of landowners to erect fences or other barriers on their property to prevent dumping.

The State legislature has increased fines for littering and illegal dumping since 2003. The basic fine for littering is \$216. Dumping of litter in an amount greater than a cubic yard will cost up to \$5,000 and could also result in possible jail time. Failure to secure a load fines start at \$216 and increase to \$5,000 and up to one year in jail if that failure causes bodily injury to another. Anyone tossing a lit cigarette or other "potentially dangerous" litter could face a \$1,025 fine. This includes items such as glass, hypodermic needles, and human waste (i.e., disposable diapers and containers of urine).

More information about litter fines and the "Litter and It Will Hurt" campaign can be found on the Washington Department of Ecology's [web site](#).

ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Public Works does not have enforcement capabilities.

Responsible county enforcement agencies include the Environmental Health Department, Sheriff's Office, and the court system. Deliberate littering and illegal dumping are forms of vandalism which are usually done in out-of-sight, unpopulated areas or at night. "Accidental" littering usually occurs from unsecured loads, garbage cans, dumpsters, and construction sites. Thurston County has a code enforcement officer from Environmental Health to initiate enforcement. A large percentage of his time is devoted to enforcement of regulations concerning illegal dumpers and private property owners that dump garbage on their own property and create neighborhood eyesores and health hazards. As far as illegal dumping goes, if items identifying the dumper are found in dumped garbage, it is presumed that the person committed the unlawful act. A letter is usually sent to them directing them to cleanup their dumping and provide receipts from the landfill or face possible legal action.



ABANDONED VEHICLES

Thousands of abandoned vehicles within Thurston County create eyesores and health hazards. Our department employs a Roads Deputy whose part-time duties include inspection and disposal of abandoned vehicles dumped in the road right-of-way.

The Development Services Department also has a compliance officer that inspects junk vehicles on private property.

For more information about the Junk Vehicle Program, visit [The Junk Vehicle Information Page](#) or call their compliance hulk vehicle line at (360) 709-3083.



COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION/HAZARDOUS MATERIAL DISPOSAL

The Department of Public Works is responsible for investigating litter and illegal dumping complaints and requests for service from the public. In addition, the Department handles disposal of hazardous materials dumped within the road right-of-way with assistance from the state Department of Ecology's Spill Response Team and Thurston County's Hazo House. These include dead farm animals, waste oil, batteries, meth lab materials, syringes and medical waste, firearms, explosives, paints and solvents. The public is encouraged to report hazmat dumping incidences immediately and keep away from all suspect containers and materials until they can be checked and disposed of properly. Contacts can be made to 9-1-1 or the Department of Public Works, dispatch office at 786-5495.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Thurston County's volunteer program assists both individuals and groups interested in cleaning county roadway shoulders. Group coordinators are required to complete a Department of Public Works safety orientation and sign a Release-of-Liability prior to beginning a community service litter project. The department also provides bags, safety vests, warning signs/stands, traffic cones, portable flashing lights, first aid kit, and pickup of collected materials. Volunteers are usually assigned low traffic, low speed roadways and are not supervised by county personnel. Unlike the state Adopt-a-Highway program, Thurston County does not erect signs acknowledging volunteer groups. Information concerning the Adopt-a-



Highway program for state roads can be found on the State Department of Transportation's [website](#).

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Thurston County's Water & Waste Management Department employs an Environmental Educator, partially funded by the Department of Ecology that conducts anti-litter and illegal dumping community educational presentations to schools and community groups.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Illegal dumpers are continually dumping on my property. Can Thurston County assist with the cleanup?

A. Thurston County sponsored crews are only allowed to clean road right-of-ways. Materials dumped illegally on private property are the responsibility of the property owner to clean up. Property owners are encouraged to secure their property through fencing or other means following cleanup.

Q. I would like a "No Dumping" sign installed to prevent further dumping on my property. Will the Department of Public Works install a sign?

A. The Department of Public Works doesn't normally install "No Dumping" signs because experience has shown that these signs are quickly vandalized and dumping usually continues and many times increases at these signed locations. Litterers and illegal dumpers have shown a disregard for environmental laws, signs, or gates. The Environmental Health Department, however, will sometimes install these signs on a case-by-case basis. Contact them at (360) 786-5455.

Q. Why don't the state, county, and cities have litter deposit areas along major roadways and on/off ramps?

A. In states where these areas have been installed, there has been minimal impact on litter problems. These areas become unsightly dumping grounds with associated health risks and must constantly be monitored and maintained.

Q. Don't high landfill rates contribute to illegal dumping and littering?

A. Not necessarily. States with free landfill dumping still experience high levels of illegal dumping and littering. Thurston County presently has free disposal of hazardous waste materials at Hazo House yet dumping of these materials continue throughout the county.

Q. We live in one of the most beautiful areas in the country. Why do people continue to litter our environment?

A. Reasons often cited for "deliberate" littering include maliciousness, perversion, laziness, drinking and driving, lack of parental supervision, lack of education, lack of enforcement of present litter and dumping laws, and a large population in transit with few ties to or pride in our community. Most people don't realize that over 40% of the problem is created by "accidental" littering (caused by uncovered or unsecured loads or auto parts becoming disengaged). According to 2006 WSDOT statistics, I-5 through Olympia has an average daily traffic count of approximately 142,000 vehicles. If only 1% of these travelers contribute to our litter problems, litter from 1,420 vehicles daily will be distributed along our State capitol area corridor.

PLEASE HELP KEEP OUR THURSTON COUNTY ENVIRONMENT CLEAN AND SAFE!