

2016

# Douglas Shire Council Illegal Dumping Strategy



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**DOUGLAS** SHIRE  
COUNCIL

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# Illegal Dumping Strategy.

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## Introduction

Illegal dumping and litter are the most visible indications of pollution in our community. Irresponsibly deposited waste defiles our streets, beaches, parks and waterways, making public spaces look unsightly and uncared for, increasing the potential for crime and deterring visitor enjoyment. Illegal dumping damages the environment, threatening wildlife and ecosystems, spreading weeds and vermin, and potentially placing public health at risk. Illegal dumping causes financial costs for governments through prevention, compliance and clean up activities; to individuals through lower property values from reduced aesthetic appeal; and to businesses by impacting on tourism.

The Douglas region is comprised of World Heritage listed vistas of natural beauty, ancient and complex ecosystems and renowned for its flora and fauna. The economy of the shire depends largely upon tourism with 1.2 million visitors annually, and upon agriculture, and residents enjoy outdoors and nature-enriched lifestyles.

The Douglas Shire Council has committed to good environmental stewardship and community leadership through its Corporate and Operational Plans and is committed to a 'zero tolerance' approach to litter and illegal dumping. This strategy details the impacts of illegal dumping, a need for local situational awareness, an overview of best practice for councils responding to illegal dumping, and direction for the Douglas Shire Council's campaign to reduce the incidence and impact of illegal dumping in our region.

## Understanding Illegal Dumping

### What is illegal dumping?

Illegal dumping is the deposit of 200 litres (an average wheelie bin) or more of any type of domestic, commercial or industrial waste outside of a designated waste management facility.<sup>1</sup> Illegal dumping includes bags of household rubbish and garden waste as well as items such as whitegoods, furniture and abandoned cars. It includes commercial or larger scale deposits of construction and demolition materials, car tyres and hazardous waste.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/waste/illegal\\_dumping\\_litter.html](https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/waste/illegal_dumping_litter.html)

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) estimates that approximately 20,666 tonnes of waste is illegally dumped in Queensland every year.<sup>2</sup>

### Impacts of Illegal Dumping

Illegal dumping is a constant and highly visible problem. Material dumped can vary significantly from small bags of rubbish and household items in an urban environment to larger scale dumping of commercial waste material in isolated areas.

The social impacts of illegal dumping can include:

- Reduction of amenity leading to reduced visits by locals and tourists
- Decrease in community pride
- Increased crime and decreased perceptions of safety: a space which looks uncared-for attracts anti-social and illegal behaviour
- Injury and public health risks through sharp objects or unsanitary materials

The potential impacts of illegal dumping on the environment include:

- Injury/death to wildlife: mistaken for food, entanglement
- Degradation of habitats leading to destruction of local biodiversity and hindering of revegetation
- Contamination of soil and water sources
- Increased susceptibility to flooding and erosion by altering drainage
- Harboursing parasites, vermin, snakes and mosquitos
- Spreading weeds and noxious plant species
- Fire

The financial impacts of illegal dumping potentially include

- Lost resources through materials which could be recycled or composted

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<sup>2</sup> Qld Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Illegal Dumping Handbook.

- Reduction in tourist numbers affecting the local economy
- Reduction in property values affecting resident individuals
- Council spending on prevention, compliance, clean-up and waste disposal

While litter, especially plastics and cigarette butts, also has social, environmental and financial impacts on our community, the motivations for and responses to littering are sufficiently different to those of illegal dumping that litter prevention is not covered in this strategy.

### Queensland Regulatory Framework

Litter and Illegal Dumping in Queensland are managed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection under the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011, which identifies offences of:<sup>3</sup>

- General littering and littering from a vehicle (including boats) under 200 L
- Dangerous littering under 200 L
- Illegal dumping – 200 L or more, to less than 2,500 L
- Illegal dumping – 2500 L and over

The WRR Act allows members of the public who have witnessed a littering or illegal dumping offence to report it.

DSC Local Laws officers are authorised under the Act to issue penalty infringement notices (PINs) and compliance notices for the clean-up of illegal dumping sites.

The WRR Act defines dangerous littering as “litter that causes or is likely to cause harm to a person, property or the environment.” Where the waste may cause serious or material environmental harm, it may be dealt with under the Environmental Protection Act 1994.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/waste/qld-litter-dumping-laws.html>. Updated June 2015

## Illegal Dumping in the Douglas Shire Local Government Area

Determining the extent and characteristics of illegal dumping is difficult because of the broad scope of definition and variety of locations in which it occurs. Governments have tended to focus their efforts on cleaning up illegally deposited waste rather than on recording and measuring the specifics of the problem. Effectively managing and preventing illegal dumping requires a thorough understanding of the local situation.

In general, dumping of household rubbish, green waste, cars and tyres is more likely to occur in rural areas whereas household furniture, white goods and construction waste is more often deposited in urban settings. Anecdotal reports from Council officers suggest that this is replicated in the Douglas Shire with car tyres, white goods and green waste a major problem in rural areas – especially waterways and range roads, deposits of household rubbish next to public bins in beach car parks, and mattresses and green waste in the suburbs. Council's CRM system shows green waste and furniture (mattresses and whitegoods) to be the items most frequently reported as illegally dumped by residents.

It was estimated in 2014 that the Douglas Shire Council spends over \$55,000 annually tackling illegal dumping but more detailed calculations are likely to show a figure much higher.

## Motivations of Illegal Dumpers

Illegal dumping is carried out by people in all parts of the community. There are many ways to tackle illegal rubbish disposal because there is no single cause: the same person may or may not illegally dump rubbish depending on situational factors. Understanding the reasons why individuals and industries illegally dump waste is critical to direct the development of effective prevention and management strategies.

Personal beliefs and understandings are very important. More than ½ of the respondents to a USA survey believed illegal dumping was motivated by high fees and distance, 40% due to a lack of transport and more than 1/3 believed it due to unawareness of fines, locations and policies. A survey of Douglas Shire residents showed that while many believe the cost of legitimate waste options is a factor; the same people are often unaware that disposal of whitegoods is free at Council Waste Transfer Facilities.



- Convenience: it can take more effort to do the right thing than to dump waste illegally.
  - People are less likely to drop litter if there is an appropriate receptacle nearby.
  - Timing of rubbish collection services does not always correspond with a resident's moving/clean-up date.
  - People living in multi-unit dwellings with little storage space and often inadequate waste/recycling management systems.
  
- Cost
  - Businesses (construction) and individuals (moving house) generating large amounts of waste can make substantial savings from illegal dumping.
  
- Consequences: the perception and actual risk of getting caught and punished is low.
  - 88% of respondents to a 2015 survey of DSC residents believe it is "not very likely" or "not at all likely" that illegal dumpers will be caught or fined.<sup>4</sup>
  - 96% of respondents were certain they knew no one who had been caught
  
- Social norms and community values
  - People will dump rubbish where other people have dumped rubbish or where 'someone else will clean it up'
  - Transient residents may lack a sense of connection to their community
  - People are more concerned about the judgement of others than the behaviour itself. Litterers know the behaviour is not acceptable and will not dump rubbish where witnesses are likely.
  - Perception that the responsibility lies with others to provide bins and clean up
  
- Knowledge and awareness
  - Lack of awareness of impact, e.g.
    - On the environment of green waste or cigarette butts
    - On clean-up services of leaving rubbish next to a public bin or charity box

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<sup>4</sup> #456353 Love Where You Live litter and illegal dumping surveys and feedback

<sup>5</sup> #456353 Love Where You Live litter and illegal dumping surveys and feedback

- Perception that furniture left on a verge will be recycled by others in community
  - Lack of knowledge of services or prices, e.g.
    - Only 1 in 5 respondents to a DSC survey were aware that it is free to dump a washing-machine at Waste Transfer Facilities
    - Less than ½ knew a carload of green-waste is free
    - ¼ knew it doesn't cost \$14 to dispose of a car tyre (actual cost is \$4)<sup>5</sup>
- Place
  - Dumping of rubbish is correlated to the cleanliness, upkeep and 'feel' of a location: rubbish, graffiti, maintenance, landscaping and community use
  - Rural areas: dumping is less visible and therefore not considered as large a problem as in urban settings

## Tackling Illegal Dumping

The Queensland Government's Litter and Illegal Dumping Action Plan involves five core functions:

- Education, engagement and awareness raising
- Reactive compliance and enforcement
- Proactive illegal dumping hot-spot projects
- Data, research and evaluation
- Capacity building and networking

The EHP recognises the significant and ongoing role of local governments, the community, and special interest groups in responding to litter and illegal dumping.<sup>6</sup>

The EHP Illegal Dumping Handbook for local governments details five objectives in tackling illegal dumping:

1. Increase the effort required to illegally dump by making access to hotspots difficult, using structural approaches such as barriers, landscaping and lighting
2. Increase the risk of getting caught

<sup>5</sup> #456353 Love Where You Live litter and illegal dumping surveys and feedback

<sup>6</sup> Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Queensland's Litter and Illegal Dumping Action Plan

- a. Increase legitimate usage of the area
  - b. Carry out periodic, high-profile compliance campaigns
  - c. Publicise successful detections and prosecutions as widely as possible
3. Reduce the rewards/financial incentives to illegally dump
  - a. Provide and/or promote free or subsidised waste services
  - b. Issue fines to offenders
  - c. Require offenders to clean up
4. Reduce provocations: don't give reasons for people to dump.
  - a. Provide efficient and well-communicated waste services
  - b. Ensure reasonable waste service costs where possible
  - c. Foster community pride by enhancing the area's aesthetic appeal and increase the sense of ownership
  - d. Keep areas free of illegally dumped material
5. Reduce excuses not to dispose legally. Educate and inform the community
  - a. Publicise waste services
  - b. Carry out education programs outlining responsibilities
  - c. Install signs at hotspots with illegal dumping prevention messages

The Douglas Shire Council's illegal dumping response will harness each of these objectives to drive strengthened activities in the following program areas:

1. Prevention: Reduce the amount of illegal dumping incidents in the Douglas region
2. Compliance: Investigate and prosecute illegal dumpers
3. Engage and educate the community about
  - a. the impacts of illegal dumping
  - b. how they can report/stop illegal dumping
  - c. legal waste disposal options and responsibilities
4. Monitor, review and evaluate: To ensure an evidence-based, effective illegal dumping response

Related objectives not covered in this strategy are:

- increased appropriate waste disposal, especially recycling, in the Douglas Shire.
- reduced litter and the impacts of litter, especially marine debris, in the Douglas Shire.

## Prevention

Illegal dumping often takes little effort. To reduce the amount of illegal dumping, Council must ensure it is more convenient for people to dispose of waste legally and make it harder to engage in illegal dumping. “Reducing temptation by providing an adequate and well-publicised waste collection service is one of the most effective ways to reduce illegal dumping of household waste.”<sup>7</sup>

1. Ensure Council’s waste services and facilities are efficient and convenient:
  - 1.1. Conduct periodic reviews of Council’s waste management facilities/services to ensure services match community expectations.
  - 1.2. Review, as necessary, public bin placement, size/type and collection frequency to ensure appropriate bins are in appropriate locations.
2. Reduce the financial incentives to illegally dump waste by keeping the cost of legal disposal affordable:
  - 2.1. Continue periodic free green waste disposal at Waste Transfer Facilities.
  - 2.2. Explore free-days for items otherwise charged for, perhaps in conjunction with pre-cyclone clean-up promotions etc.
  - 2.3. Consider the costs/benefits of implementing an annual kerbside/roadside hard rubbish collection in residential areas.
3. Ensure access to Waste Transfer Facilities is perceived as convenient and affordable:
  - 3.1. Review public information on waste disposal services and facilities to ensure it is available in multiple platforms and easily comprehensible formats.
  - 3.2. Better promote the cost of waste services offered.

“Environmental planning and environment protection legislation have complementary roles, and both can be used to prevent and respond to incidents of illegal dumping. In some instances, it may be more appropriate for councils to use environmental planning legislation such as Sustainable Planning Act 2009, over the EP Act or the WRR Act.”<sup>8</sup>

4. Utilise Council’s planning authority to encourage appropriate waste management planning as part of demolition/development approvals.
  - 4.1. Initiate process to require applicants to prepare waste management plans including estimates of the quantity and types of waste to be generated by their

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<sup>7</sup> Qld Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Illegal Dumping Handbook

<sup>8</sup> Qld Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Illegal Dumping Handbook

proposal, detailing how waste will be stored, transported and recycled or disposed of lawfully.

4.2. Investigate practicability of including compliance requirements:

4.2.1. Applicants to submit waste disposal receipts to Council as a condition of development consent.

4.2.2. Council officers to conduct audits of lawful waste disposal.

Structural barriers to appropriate waste disposal options can increase the likelihood of illegal dumping of waste. Many medium and high density residential dwellings present common challenges to effective waste disposal: communal waste management with inadequate consideration given to storage and collection requirements, lack of storage for individual residents and outside management by Body Corporates. It is important that the principles of best practice waste management are incorporated into the design of new developments.

5. Explore the potential for developing a guide to assist architects, developers and building owners/managers to incorporate best practice waste management services in multi-unit dwellings.

Individuals are more inclined to illegally dump rubbish in areas which already contain litter or rubbish, graffiti, vandalism or are unsightly and poorly maintained.

6. Keep public spaces and infrastructure well maintained, landscaped and free from litter and graffiti.
7. Work with community members and organisations to populate public spaces with positive activities, e.g. Active Games in the Park, Christmas in the Park etc. and promote appropriate community use of public spaces.
8. Ensure a rapid response to clean up illegally dumped material to reduce the likelihood of repeated dumping.
9. Install effective structural measures to deter offenders by increasing the effort and risk of being caught.
  - 9.1. Utilise Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to investigate installation of physical barriers to deter illegal dumping in identified hotspots: e.g. lighting, bollards, landscaping.

## Compliance

The decision to illegally dump waste materials is influenced by the perceived risk and consequences of getting caught. To increase the perceived risk, it is necessary to investigate, prosecute and publicise offenders.<sup>9</sup>

1. Increase surveillance in identified illegal dumping hotspots:
  - 1.1. Increase use of CCTV cameras and council patrols to respond to illegal dumping incidents.
  - 1.2. Ensure rapid response times to complaints of illegal dumping incidents.
  - 1.3. Conduct periodic, high profile crackdowns in illegal dumping hotspots.
2. Introduce a standardised process for illegal dumping responses and investigations to ensure all incidents are handled in a timely and 'best practise' manner [see below].
3. Increase public profile of illegal dumping investigations and prosecutions:
  - 3.1. Implement the EHP Illegal Dumping Handbook sticker/mobile signage and barrier tape campaign indicating an illegal dumping incident has occurred and is under investigation.
4. Reinforce the consequences of offending by prosecuting offenders:
  - 4.1. Require offenders clean up illegal dumping sites or be issued fines.

Section 118 of the WRR Act gives any person the opportunity to report littering or illegal dumping where a vehicle registration number is observed. A USA survey indicated that 83% of respondents would be willing to report illegal dumping but 85% of respondents were unaware of available reporting methods.<sup>10</sup>

5. Encourage public assistance in reporting illegal dumping.
  - 5.1. Inform residents what constitutes illegal dumping and how best to report it.
  - 5.2. Include a user-friendly reporting form on DSC website to make reporting easier.
  - 5.3. Use 'See it, Report it, Stop it' logo where appropriate and link to <https://report-littering-dumping.ehp.qld.gov.au/> to be accessed on mobile devices.

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<sup>9</sup> Qld Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Illegal Dumping Handbook

<sup>10</sup> Cowee, Margaret W. and Kynda, Curtis. R. 2010. Resident Perceptions of Illegal Dumping on Public Lands, Economics/Applied Economics/2010-02.

- 5.4. Equip customer service staff with a list of questions to ask people reporting illegal dumping.
- 5.5. Embed invitations for public assistance in reporting illegal dumping into incident investigation processes through letters to surrounding properties and/or mobile signage where appropriate.

Advertising successful prosecutions and the penalties involved increases the perceived risk of getting caught and the seriousness of the consequences. Only 7% of respondents to DSC survey believed the fine for illegal dumping was \$1000 - \$3000; 74% of respondents underestimated the amount by at least \$1000 and only 2% overestimated the level of fines.

6. Utilise varied opportunities and methods to publicise prosecutions for illegal dumping.
  - 6.1. Reinforce public understanding that illegal dumping is a crime that is taken seriously by Council.
  - 6.2. Raise awareness of the extent of the penalties involved.
  - 6.3. Reassure residents that Council is taking effective action to address illegal dumping.
  - 6.4. Encourage reporting of illegal dumping incidents and offenders.

## **Community Engagement and Education**

A comprehensive education campaign should ensure that residents understand their options and responsibilities regarding waste disposal as well as the social, environmental and financial impacts of illegal dumping.

1. Explore and implement a range of education resources and activities including:
  - 1.1. A dedicated page on Council's website outlining the illegal dumping strategy and promoting legitimate waste collection services and reporting tools.
  - 1.2. Mobile signage (banners or corflutes) placed in high profile places promoting a crackdown on illegal dumping.
  - 1.3. 'Dump Stunts': Place a pile of 'illegally dumped' material in a public place with an information stall about the impacts of illegal dumping on the environment, dumper, community and Council.

- 1.4. Media releases and advertisements launching the illegal dumping strategy and compliance campaigns including promoting successful prosecutions as appropriate.
  - 1.4.1. Promote good practise such as tying down loads and improved collection.
  - 1.4.2. Involve feedback and 'call to action' to build participation in the campaign.
- 1.5. Co-branding of Council's waste and illegal dumping resources with the 'Love where you Live' logo (or similar) to build community identification with legal/illegal waste disposal options.
2. Liaise with industries involved in disposing of commercial amounts of green waste, building and construction waste etc. to ensure they are aware of their legal requirements, impacts of illegal dumping and barriers to appropriate waste disposal options.
3. Support community partners in piloting community-based programs to assist those with limited mobility or access to transport e.g. elderly, to access appropriate waste disposal options.

Promotional activities and events that build pride in community help reinforce social norms that litter and illegal dumping are not acceptable and that target locations are important and valued.

4. Work with community members and organisations to promote clean-ups and prevention of litter campaigns:
  - 4.1. Tangaroa Blue beach clean-ups.
  - 4.2. Clean Up Australia, the Great Northern Clean Up etc.
  - 4.3. Reef Guardians marine debris program.
  - 4.4. Motivate local communities and volunteer groups: Schools, sporting clubs, Neighbourhood Watch and Bushcare groups to identify illegal dumping hotspots and develop local prevention strategies.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

A continual improvement process of monitoring, review and evaluation is required as part of a flexible and effective illegal dumping strategy. Incident and location data



collection is the foundation of evidence-based benchmarking, prioritising, planning and evaluation of responses to illegal dumping.<sup>11</sup>

1. Develop a detailed incident database of the extent and nature of illegal dumping within the Douglas LGA.
  - 1.1. Ensure details of every incident of illegal dumping i.e. location, date, materials and volume, is recorded before clean-up commences, particularly of incidents not otherwise recorded.
  - 1.2. As the tablet incident management system is further rolled out to Council's outdoors crews, create an 'illegal dumping' field and utilise the photo and GPS capabilities to populate an incident database.
  - 1.3. Use CRM entries to identify public reports of illegal dumping.
  - 1.4. Run regular reports on the GL Task numbers describing clean-ups of illegal dumping to better determine costs of clean-ups.
  - 1.5. Determine an appropriate process to calculate the cost to DSC of investigation and prosecution of illegal dumping.
2. Instigate regular reviews of collated data and develop an analysis and reporting tool to better understand trends in illegal dumping and the impact of intervention efforts.
3. Implement an annual review and report from internal partners on DSC's Illegal Dumping Strategy response.

### Recommended Investigation Process

- 1) Report of illegal dumping logged with CRM or discovered by Council crews.
- 2) Council officer documents and, where possible, collects evidence of source of waste:
  - a) Photos, notes including time, date, location, description and volume in case further enforcement action required.
- 3) Dumped material sectioned off with yellow 'crime scene' tape and stickered/signed to indicate 'illegal dumping under investigation':
  - a) Unless rubbish is an immediate danger to public health and safety, it should be left for 3 days to alert the public that Council is investigating and takes illegal dumping seriously.
- 4) An information letter to be distributed to surrounding properties to alert residents that illegal dumping is under investigation and requesting anyone with information to contact Council.
- 5) Council officers return after 3 days:
  - a) If offender can be identified a letter is issued to remove the waste or an infringement notice is issued.

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<sup>11</sup> Qld Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. 2013. Illegal Dumping Handbook

- b) If the waste has not been removed and an offender cannot be identified, Council will remove the waste.
- 6) All incidents will be recorded in Council's database.

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