

**SITE VISIT REPORT
SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN INITIATIVE AREA
ILLEGAL DUMPING ASSESSMENT PROJECT**

INTRODUCTION

A site visit was conducted in the Southeast Michigan geographic initiative area (GIA) in May 1997 as part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) illegal dumping assessment project (IDAP). EPA met with involved parties to discuss illegal dumping issues and programs in the GIA and visited representative illegal dumping sites. This report identifies key contacts in Southeast Michigan. It also discusses the nature of the problem; county, local municipal government, and community group efforts to address the problem, and additional resources needed.

KEY CONTACTS

Key Contact, Title, and Organization	Address and Telephone No.	Jurisdiction/ Focus Area	Illegal Dumping Program Summary
Ann Vogen Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Waste Management Division (WMD)	300 River Place Suite 3600 Detroit, MI 48226 (313) 392-6525	City of Detroit	Provides police inspection assistance; Compliance at regulated facilities (WMD) dumping complaints (ERD)
Donna Southwell Environmental Response Coordinator Washtenaw County Environmental Health Department	4101 Washtenaw Ave. Ann Arbor, MI 48107 (313) 971-4542	Washtenaw County	Lead environmental regulations task force, respond to complaints; coordinates cleanup efforts
Mike Droze Wayne County Dept of Environment Land Resource Management Division	3600 Commerce Ct. Wayne, MI 48184 (313) 326-4437	Wayne County outside City of Detroit limits	Responds to complaints; conducts surveillance
Gregory Moore Illegal Dumping Task Force City of Detroit Department of Environmental Affairs	600 Woodward Ave. 1650 First National Building Detroit, MI 48226 (313) 237-3095	City of Detroit	Coordinates task force, informs DPD & DPW of enforcement options; conducts surveillance, enforcement and community outreach.
Sgt. Remson DEEP Task Force Detroit Police Department	(313) 596-5265	City of Detroit	Conducts surveillance and enforcement activities
Donelle Wilkins Director Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice	12101 Mack Spruce Dr. Detroit, MI 48215 (313)821-1064	City of Detroit	Technical assistance and support for communities facing problems
Kathy Milberg Executive Director Southwest Detroit Environmental Visions	P.O. Box 09400 Detroit, MI 48209 (313) 842-1961	Southwest Detroit	Coordinates community cleanups and outreach
Tonya Allen Project Manager Rebuilding Communities Initiative	11148 Harper Ave. Detroit, MI 48213 (313)571-2800	City of Detroit	Organize neighborhoods, youth programs, support block clubs
Elwin Cole Director Macomb County Department of Health and Environmental Services	43525 Elizabeth Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (810) 469-5236	Macomb County	

Key Contact, Title, and Organization	Address and Telephone No.	Jurisdiction/ Focus Area	Illegal Dumping Program Summary
Jim Noerr Chief Monroe County Environmental Health Services	29 Washington Street Monroe, MI 48161 (313) 243-7155	Monroe County	
John Parsons Health Officer Ron Miller Director of Enforcement St. Clair County Department of Health	3415 28th Street Port Huron, MI 48060	St. Clair County	
Larry Stephens Health Officer Lenawee County Health Department	Human Services Bldg. 1040 S. Winter Adrian, MI 49221	Lenawee County	

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

City of Detroit

Illegal dumping is widespread throughout the City of Detroit and some neighboring communities. The Delray area is a frequent target for illegal dumpers (Photo 1). Tires, household wastes such as furniture, and waste from repairs such as shingles and construction and demolition debris are typically found.

Illegal dumping areas within city limits have common characteristics. In residential areas, dumping is typically found on streets with abandoned homes, vacant lots, and homes with structural damage in lower-income neighborhoods.

Local officials indicated that individuals living outside city limits drive into the city to dump trash on vacant properties. Potential reasons cited include lack of enforcement, insufficient manpower to identify property owners, and the existence of legal and illegal dumping areas that serve as “magnets.” For example, Detroit’s bulk trash pickups can result in piles of trash being left at the curbside, sometimes for weeks, awaiting pickup. Several permitted disposal areas exist, but they are unattractive to residents without the financial means to pay for disposal.

Rarely do addresses appear on dumped materials, and dumpers usually drive old pickup trucks without plates. Vehicles can be impounded and citations issued, but an officer has to observe the crime and the driver must be identified. Enforcement is further complicated by the fact that trucks used for dumping may belong to companies and not drivers. If the dumper does not own the truck, the case is usually thrown out of court because of uncertainty about who actually committed the crime. Further dumping problems are caused by businesses without pick up services and contractors. Many illegal dumping areas contain shingles and waste generated from home repairs. Residents making repairs on weekends may not properly dispose of wastes because the landfill is closed or the disposal costs and travel time to the landfill or transfer station is high. Other contributing factors include laws in surrounding communities that may inadvertently promote dumping within the city, lack of enforcement, and public acceptance of dumping because of its historical occurrence.

Junk yards without permits are another common problem. A number of residences with adjacent yards or vacant property turn into junk yards (Photo 2). Residents often begin storing old cars on their property,

and then other items accumulate until the lot eventually becomes out of control, expanding into adjacent alleys (Photo 3). Junk yard operators do not need permits if local zoning allows them. If a permit is required, notification of an application is only provided to residents within 300 feet of a proposed site. Factors contributing to the existence of unpermitted junk yards include lack of enforcement and a “domino effect.” Local officials mentioned various factors that contribute to weak enforcement efforts, including few residential complaints and limited city resources; late night dumping activities; identifying dumpers without eyewitnesses; and other crimes (drug-related) that compete for resources. MDEQ is developing junk yard enforcement options.

Plans to expand the Detroit City Airport contributed to dumping problems because areas within the expansion boundaries were not maintained on the understanding that it would be developed. These areas were repeatedly cleaned up and dumped on again. Typically, sites that have been cleared and show development activity stay clean.

Tire dumping is regulated by Part 169, Scrap Tires, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451. MDEQ and city cleanup efforts are reducing stockpiles, but tire dumping continues. Though enforcement tends to occur when the violators are known, limited response activities are conducted when the dumpers are unknown, increasing the need for public participation to report offenders. A primary incentive for many tire dumpers is obtaining money to support drug use, and tires may be dumped close to where drugs are purchased.

If property taxes are not paid for 3 years, the property reverts to the state. The state notifies the property owner and gives the owner an opportunity to redeem the property, which can take an additional 3 years. If the property is not redeemed by the owner, the state offers the property to the city. Historically the city accepted all such property, but recently the city has refused contaminated property. Identifying the owner of a vacant lot can require several hours of research, and thousands of vacant sites exist.

Abandoned industrial facilities are commonly used by illegal dumpers who claim to be legitimate business operators while they fill buildings tires and debris, and then abandon the site. Such sites are exemplified by the Stramaglia site (Photo 5), the Packard industrial area (Photo 6) and at the Recycling Corporation of America site (Photo 8). The owner created huge piles of debris, declared bankruptcy, and is deceased.

In one particularly distressed area near Heidelberg Street, a local artist has used trash and household rubbish to develop an artistic project that makes a statement about conditions in urban areas. The project, referred to as the Heidelberg Project, spans several blocks and includes homes, trees, lawns, vacant lots, and other neighborhood features covered with discarded items (Photos 11 - 14).

Areas Outside The City

A commonality between areas within and outside city limits is lack of funds to pay for proper waste disposal. Tire piles, junk yards, and construction debris are typical in dumping areas (Photo 9). A common characteristic cited by individuals interviewed was a perception that these areas are perceived as ideal for dumping.

The undeveloped southwest area within Wayne County is flat and prone to flooding. Residents often advertise requests for clean fill to protect against flooding, and this practice leads to disposal of debris other than clean fill if not closely monitored and controlled. Illegal dumping near landfills is another common practice. If a landfill rejects a load of waste, or quotes a high price, it may end up dumped on a nearby roadside (Photo10).

In Washtenaw County (50% rural, 50% urban), illegally dumped waste generally consists of mostly bulky materials such as sofas and sinks. In rural areas, poverty is common and proper waste disposal is cost prohibitive. Also, waste pickup is lacking because of the low tax base. Small business owners who must dispose of chemicals and other materials are common dumpers. The interstate highway system running from Canada throughout Detroit brings trucks transporting materials to and from industries that dump materials along highways and side streets.

STATE EFFORTS

MDEQ Waste Management Division (WMD) focuses on regulated facilities and solid waste dumping issues; the Environmental Response Division handles non-solid waste complaints. While illegal dumping is an important issue, resources are limited and licensing and permitting issues take priority. The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), Public Act 451, Part 115 contains detailed regulations regarding handling and disposal of solid waste. MDEQ personnel conduct surveillance and enforcement activities.

The State initiated and completed several clean ups in Detroit, including the Revere Copper and Brass site (Photo 15). A 12' barbed-wire fence was erected to limit trespassing and a security guard kept dumpers out during the cleanup. Similar efforts are planned for several other sites.

COUNTY EFFORTS

Wayne County

The Wayne County Department of the Environment's Land Resource Management Division (LRMD) is responsible for enforcing solid waste management regulations outside Detroit city limits. The county conducts routine inspections of landfills, monitoring of disposal activities, and responds to complaints. Solid Waste Ordinance No. 90-407 contains regulations regarding handling and disposal of solid waste.

Under the county dumping ordinance, the sheriff's office can become involved in enforcement and issue fines. Typically, when problems occur and offenders are identified, county personnel issue a warning, explain appropriate disposal procedures, provide an explanation of regulations. If an offender repeats the crime, a citation is issued and a fine is imposed (usually about \$200). A third offense usually results in an additional fine of about \$200, and a fourth offense can result in a fine of \$1000. The Department pursues civil cases and issues citations when the Road Commission does not take action on illegal dumping offenses along county roads. The county has outlined waste disposal activities for the Road Commission in a guidance document.

Wayne County established a 24 hour illegal dumping complaint telephone number and inspectors respond to the complaints. Direct observation is used to identify dumping problems, which then become part of routine surveillance activity. The use of barriers to block access to areas that would otherwise become targets for illegal dumping activities has been successful in deterring dumpers (Photo 16).

Washtenaw County

Washtenaw County has regulations governing illegal dumping pursuant to the Public Health Code. When illegal dumps are found, officials notify MDEQ. If an immediate response is needed, the County addresses the problem. The county is authorized to spend up to \$5000 to clean up an area and can request authorization to spend up to \$25000, which can be reimbursed by MDEQ. USEPA may participate if a release poses an immediate threat to human health or the environment.

Members of an environmental regulation task force have special deputy status to issue citations. The task force also drafts policies and procedures for approval by the county's environmental issues group. The task force developed and distributed a guidebook of policies and procedures to address illegal dumping to all county departments that might encounter the problem.

The county has made an effort to establish good working relationships with other entities because many issues are multi county and multi jurisdictional. Communication and information-sharing constitute a major component of Washtenaw County's coordinated environmental response. For example, when public safety centers ("911" centers) receive calls, the task force is immediately contacted if an environmental issue is suspected. The Solid Waste Department provides about \$2000 to townships for "spring cleaning" of sites. However, after the efforts, illegal dumping often resumes due to a lack of public education and awareness.

MUNICIPAL EFFORTS

The City of Detroit established a midnight dumping task force and a full-time coordinator was hired to work on illegal dumping issues. The Detroit Environmental Enforcement Project (DEEP) task force consists of police, firefighters, and MDEQ conservation officers working together to pursue dumpers.

The task force targets certain areas for surveillance, and attempts to catch dumpers in the act. If caught, dumpers can be arrested and vehicles impounded. An officer must observe the crime or an eyewitness must testify in court for a case to be prosecuted as a criminal offense under Codes 22-2-82 and 22-2-88. Such cases usually result in a minimum fine of about \$300, and the violator must clean up the dump site and document to the court that waste was disposed of properly. If the conditions are not satisfied, the violator can be jailed for 10-30 days and their vehicle impounded. This enforcement limits repeat offenses. If an incident presents a fire hazard, a ticket can be issued for violation of applicable fire codes.

Task force members participate in community block meetings and monthly community relations meetings to inform residents of proper waste disposal, bulk pickup days, and procedures for reporting violations. In addition, suggestions are taken from residents for improving the program. Since the task force's inception, there have been many arrests and hundreds of citations issued, and there is an increased awareness that police will respond to incidents. Several city departments have enforcement authority but lack sufficient enforcement resources.

Annual "clean sweeps," and free, monthly bulk waste pickup days contribute to preventing dumping. Concrete barriers and fencing have been placed along some utility corridor areas (Photo 19). Other preventive measures involve residents voluntarily maintaining and protecting areas around properties.

COMMUNITY GROUP EFFORTS

The Southwest Tire Roundup, sponsored by the Southwest Detroit Environmental Visions (SDEV), uses grant money from Wayne County and pays local residents to bring tires to designated drop off sites. SDEV offered 25 cents per tire and collected 8000 tires (1995) and 6000 tires in 1996. The tires were transported from the drop off locations, shredded, and used as road fill. SDEV received \$3000 from a local bank for disposal costs.

Community members and other stakeholders created a common vision and plan for addressing environmental threats, called the Southwest Environmental Vision Project Community Plan. During this process, community members were actively engaged in discussing issues and offering their ideas for addressing the issues. SDEV's ideas for addressing illegal dumping include the following: (1) establish

a reward program for residents who report dumping; (2) provide a stipend or otherwise compensate people who take a day off from work to go to court and testify against dumpers; (3) keep the bulk pickup program but enforce against those who fail to abide by the rules (for example, issue citations to homeowners who place bulk items out too early); and (4) establish and enforce a system to fine absentee landlords when dumping occurs on their properties.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES NEEDED

The following resource needs were identified:

- (1) Additional personnel to respond to complaints, investigate and enforce
- (2) Police radios, night vision equipment, cameras and recorders for case information
- (3) Public education and information, including:
 - Contact names and telephone numbers
 - Steps to report illegal dumping events
 - Rules and regulations governing illegal dumping
 - Locations of acceptable places to dispose of waste.
 - Solutions to the problem for residents
- (4) Youth involvement programs in dumping prevention



Photograph No. 1

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: An illegal dump site in a southwest area of Detroit referred to as the Delray area



Photograph No. 2

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: Residential area in southwest Detroit where homeowner has begun using yard space to store old cars; vacant property lies adjacent to this residence



Photograph No. 3

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: Alley being used to dump tires and other debris



Photograph No. 4

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: A vacant lot across the street from Detroit City Airport where illegally dumped tires were observed



Photograph No. 5

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: A site in southwest Detroit that illustrates the severity of the illegal dumping problem



Photograph No. 6

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: An abandoned facility that has been filled with illegally dumped materials



Photograph No. 7

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: An abandoned, vacant lot in Detroit that has become a target for illegal dumping activity



Photograph No. 8

Date: May 5, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: An illegal dump site in southwest Detroit that is located next to an elementary school and that is easily accessible from a residential street



Photograph No. 9

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Wayne County outside City of Detroit limits

Description: The back portion of a junkyard; area in front contains items allowed under the permit; back portion contains improperly stored items as well as items not allowed under the permit



Photograph No. 10

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Wayne County outside city of Detroit limits

Description: An area adjacent to the Woodland Meadows landfill that is typically used for illegal dumping of items not accepted by the landfill

Photograph No. 11

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: The Heidelberg Project: an area spanning several blocks where an artist uses trash and household rubbish to make a statement about conditions in urban areas



Photograph No. 12

Location: Detroit

Description: The Heidelberg Project: an area spanning several blocks where an artist uses trash and household rubbish to make a statement about conditions in urban areas

Date: May 6, 1997



Photograph No. 13

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: The Heidelberg Project: an area spanning several blocks where an artist uses trash and household rubbish to make a statement about conditions in urban areas



Photograph No. 14

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: The Heidelberg Project: an area spanning several blocks where an artist uses trash and household rubbish to make a statement about conditions in urban areas



Photograph No. 15

Date: May 7, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: A former dump site on the southwest side of Detroit that has been cleaned up and remains clean



Photograph No. 16

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Wayne County outside City of Detroit limits

Description: An area where barriers have been used to deter dumpers; because of its remote location and accessibility, this area would otherwise be a target for illegal dumping



Photograph No. 17

Date: May 6, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: Detroit Environmental Enforcement Project task force members pull over a person driving a pickup truck carrying tires and a drum; the person was suspected of being a potential illegal dumper



Photograph No. 18

Date: May 7, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: Glass pile in an area formerly used as a parking lot; material is collected by a suburban glass recycling company and subsequently dumped here



Photograph No. 19

Date: May 7, 1997

Location: Detroit

Description: A utility corridor area that has been fenced off to deter illegal dumpers