

How trash affects our waters

Styrofoam from a take-out meal is tossed from a car window. The bed of a pickup is cleaned out on a gravel bar at the river, leaving behind a partly used can of bug spray, beer bottles, a can of old paint, a used tire and a half-quart of motor oil. A rainstorm washes litter from the roadside to the nearest creek; high water floods the gravel bar. The result: the river now contains traces of oil, paint and pesticides. Some of the debris is caught at the nearest bend, marring the natural beauty of the landscape, obstructing canoe traffic, and potentially injuring swimmers and waders.



Although chemicals from a dump site may be quickly diluted in the stream, the effects of hundreds of small dumps and littering throughout the watershed add up, causing problems we may not detect for years. Chemicals that do not reach a stream in surface runoff soak into the ground, contaminating the soil and even the groundwater. From there, pollutants can reach water wells and endanger drinking water.

Magnitude of the problem

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation spends over \$4 million per year cleaning up trash along state roads. The Oklahoma Scenic River Commission picks up 600 bags (9 tons) by boat every summer from the Illinois River alone. A one-time cleanup of all dumpsites in Oklahoma would cost taxpayers nearly \$4 million.

Laws

Disposing of wastes by the roadside, in a stream, or on the property of others is illegal. In Oklahoma, it's a crime punishable by fines of up to \$5000, possible jail time, or other penalties ordered by the court.



What is being done to fight illegal dumping

State agencies and private citizens are trying to attack this problem in two ways. On the one hand, money is spent improving enforcement of anti-dumping and anti-littering laws. **Trash cops** have been hired in several counties. And the statewide Litter Hotline (1-888-5-LITTER) is available for citizens to report littering from vehicles.

At the same time, county solid waste management officials offer alternatives such as transfer stations and landfill

locations for getting rid of wastes locally. Waste transfer stations in Cherokee, Delaware, and Sequoyah counties and a landfills in Adair and Sequoyah Counties accept many types of waste for a fee.



Some counties offer rural collection sites at convenient locations. These may be groups of dumpsters along major roads, or supervised fenced areas set up to accept and transport bulky waste like sofas and appliances.



A few cities have drop-off recycling centers. Some communities also hold periodic Collection Events for special wastes, including hazardous household pollutants, waste tires, paint, or roadside litter.

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, with help from OSU Cooperative Extension holds an agricultural pesticide container collection in several locations each year.

Protect our waters from trash

1. **Use Less Stuff.** Buying less packaging, means less to throw away.
2. When on the river or trail, come back with everything you bring in. **Pack it in, pack it out.**
3. **Re-use containers.** Keep food, cleaning products, and other supplies in refillable containers.
4. **Recycle.** Take cans, bottles, paper, and cardboard to a recycling center. Compost kitchen and yard wastes.
5. **Be a volunteer.** Participate in the next local roadside or park Cleanup Day. Or, organize one yourself. Many communities join the yearly Oklahoma Trash-off Day in April.
6. **Adopt-A-Highway.** If your group or business cleans up a specific 2-mile stretch of public road, Oklahoma Department of Transportation puts up a highway sign advertising your contribution.
7. Participate in the annual Oklahoma **Scenic River Cleanup.** You can also bring a bag and plan to pick up a little trash yourself whenever you visit a river or lake.
8. Join **Blue Thumb** water quality volunteers. (Call the Cherokee or Adair county conservation district.)
9. Remember, in and along the Scenic Rivers, glass and styrofoam are prohibited.

Who to contact

If you see signs of illegal dumping, call the local sheriff's office, the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, or the OK Litter Hotline. Law

enforcement officials have a duty to enforce open dumping laws. They need your help! Give them all the information you can.

- **Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission:** 918-456-3251
- **OK Litter Hotline:** 1-888-5-LITTER (To report littering from vehicles, record license no., make, model and color of car, what was thrown, when and where.)
- **OK Dept. of Environmental Quality Complaint Hotline:** 1-800-522-0206 (Complaints are kept anonymous on request)
- **Solid Waste Institute of Northeast Oklahoma:** 918-456-0116 or www.swino.org (See Oklahoma's laws pertaining to illegal dumping, littering, open burning, and solid waste management.)
- **OK Department of Transportation:** 405-521-4037 or www.okladot.state.ok.us/public-info (Get details of Adopt-A-Highway, Trash-Off Day, and Litter Hotline Program.)
- **County OSU Cooperative Extension and Conservation District Offices.**

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Protect the Illinois River from the Threat of TRASH



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