



# Resident Perceptions of Illegal Dumping on Public Lands

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## Introduction

Nearly 70 percent of the Great Basin consists of public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other government agencies. Illegal dumping on public lands, i.e., the disposal of trash and other consumer goods, creates an externality because its effects are not compensated by or paid for by the illegal dumping offender and therefore generate a cost to society. Illegal dumping poses risks to human, animal, and environmental health and safety on public lands. Dumpsites on public lands, considered a form of vandalism, are unattractive and negatively affect the outdoor experience of public land users, while dumpsites near residential neighborhoods may reduce home values (EPA, 1998). Dumped items can lead to water and air pollution or contamination, and create brush fire hazards. Illegally dumped vehicles, fencing, and electronic equipment can cause harm to both domestic and wild animals that may be cut, become entwined or exposed to chemicals. Additionally, lost revenue in the form of vehicle scrapping (metal and parts) may result.



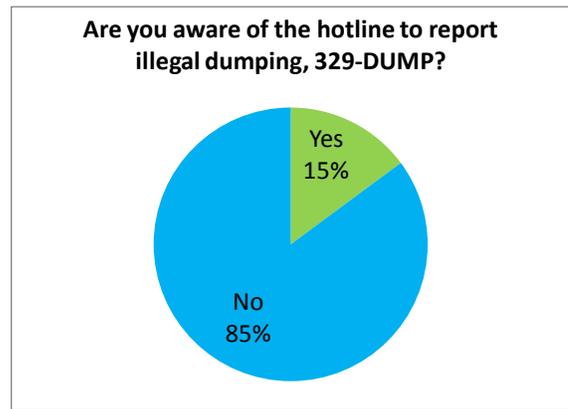
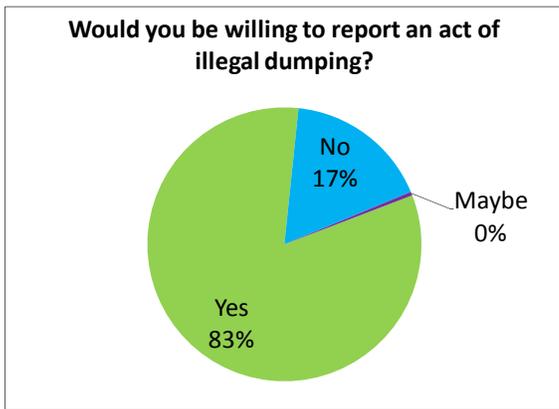
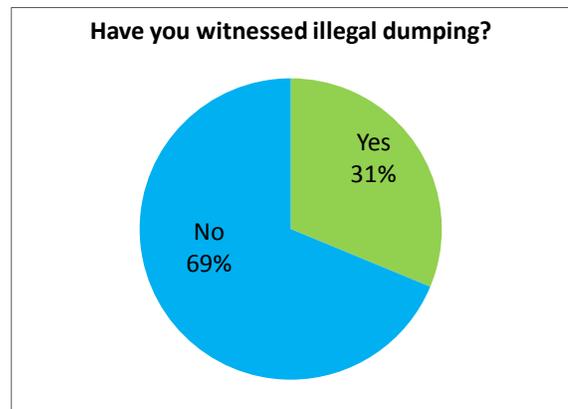
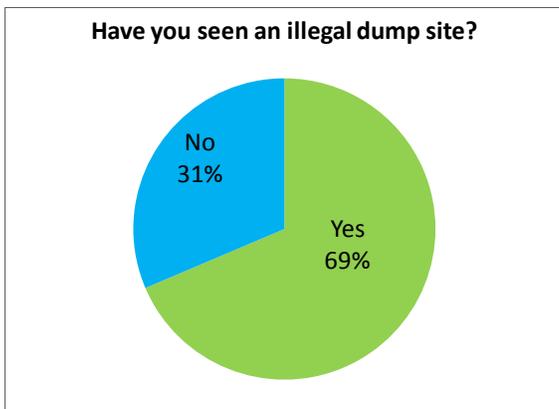
Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful (KTMB), a Northern Nevada nonprofit agency, collected 330 tons of trash from public spaces since it began the annual Great Truckee Meadows Cleanup program in 2006. In an effort to better understand the motivations behind illegal dumping, as well as to assess resident perceptions of illegal dumping, KTMB conducted a resident survey with assistance from students in a 100-level resource economics class at the University of Nevada, Reno in the Fall of 2009. The students, as a service learning project, studied the economic and environmental issues surrounding illegal dumping, conducted the in-person survey of 452 residents, and presented the results to KTMB and the Illegal Dumping Task Force. This publication provides an overview of survey respondent experience with

illegal dumping, why they believe people dump goods in public areas, as well as the importance they place on eliminating illegal dumping on public lands.

### Resident Illegal Dumping Experience and Rational

Survey respondents were asked to provide information about their previous experiences with illegal dumping. When asked if they had ever seen an illegal dump site, 69% of respondents (310 respondents) said they had seen a dump site, while the other 31% (142 respondents) said they had not. When asked if they had witnessed an act of illegal

dumping, 31% of respondents (141 correspondents) said they had witnessed an act of illegal dumping, while the other 69% (310 respondents) said they had not. When respondents were asked if they would be willing to report an act of illegal dumping, 83% (372 respondents) said they would be willing, 17% (77 respondents) said they would not, and less than 1% (2 respondents) said they would consider it. When asked if they were aware of the Illegal Dumping Hotline to report illegal dumping, 85% of respondents (383 respondents) said they were not aware of the hotline, while the other 15% (65 respondents) said they were aware of the hotline.



### What should I do if I see illegal dumping?

If you witness an act of illegal dumping or come across an existing illegal dump site on public property, call your local sheriff's office. Do not approach an illegal dumping offender and do not attempt to clean up illegally dumped items yourself, as the dumped items may contain evidence the authorities can use to find and prosecute the offender. If you are able to take down the license plate or a physical description of the offender without endangering yourself, this information would also be useful to the authorities. It is very important that do you not confront the offender, as you may run the risk of putting yourself in danger.

Why do you think people choose to dump illegally?	Percent of Total Sample
Fees of legal disposal are too high	69%
Distance to landfill/transfer station too far	51%
Lack of proper transportation (truck/trailer) to landfill/transfer station	40%
Unaware of illegal dumping fine(s) and/or penalties	38%
Unaware of landfill/transfer station location	34%
Unaware of landfill/transfer station policies towards bulky, construction or yard waste	34%
Hours of operation at landfill/transfer station inconvenient	30%
Laziness	14%
Apathy/Ignorance/Don't think it's bad	6%

## Why do people choose to dump illegally?

Survey respondents were presented with a list of potential rational for dumping illegally rather than using their legal options. While more than half of the respondents believed illegal disposal was related to high fees and distance, 40% believed it was due to a lack of proper transportation and more than a third of all respondents felt it was due to unawareness of fines, locations, and policies. This information could be used in the future to target educational campaigns in an effort to increase residents' awareness of their options.

For each of the following statements regarding Waste Management services, please indicate whether the statement is true or false .	Percent Correct
The Lockwood Landfill will take recyclable items free of charge	61%
The Lockwood Landfill holds free dump days	60%
Residential customers who have a WM green plastic 96 gallon container are allowed to put seven extra 32 gallon bags of trash out on a normal service day	57%
Water-based house paint can be put into a normal garbage container if dried out	48%
The transfer stations will take 2 automotive batteries, 5 quarts of used uncontaminated motor oil and 2 gallons of anti freeze for free per residential customer	47%
The Lockwood Landfill will take one residential refrigerator for free	47%
The Lockwood Landfill/transfer stations will take only one computer monitor or television per residential customer at normal trash rates	45%
The Lockwood Landfill will take one bulky item (such as a mattress or sofa) for free	45%

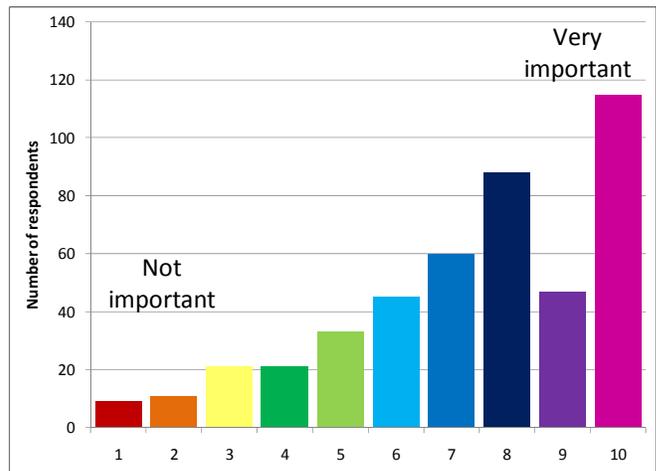
## How well do you understand your Waste Management services?

Survey respondents were presented with a list of statements regarding Waste Management services and were asked to indicate whether the statement was true or false. In all cases, the statement was true. The results indicate that 39-55% of survey respondents were unaware of their Waste Management services. This is another area to consider for future educational programs, particularly when viewed along with the illegal dumping motivations. For example, 69% of respondents felt people dump illegally because the disposal fees are too high, and this quiz indicates that 40% of respondents did not know that Lockwood Landfill (near Reno, NV) hosts free dump days.



## Is the elimination of illegal dumping on public lands important?

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of eliminating illegal dumping on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 indicated that it was not important, and 10 indicated that it was very important. Over all respondents, the average rating was 7.36, indicating a high level of importance. Nine percent of respondents (41 respondents) rated the importance of eliminating illegal dumping from 1 to 3, while 56% of respondents (250 respondents) rated it high, from 8 to 10.



## Conclusions

Survey results illustrate the prevalence of illegal dumping on public lands (69% of survey respondents have seen an illegal dump site) and the high importance residents place on reducing or eliminating illegal dumping on public lands (56% of respondents rated important from 8 to 10).

According to survey results residents are very unaware of the services available to them for disposing of personal and business items. This would indicate that improved communication regarding Waste Management services through billing statements, newsletters, and advertising may increase the use of legal dumping services. Additionally, survey respondents felt that disposal fees and the distance to the landfill/transfer station were primary contributors to illegal dumping. Providing low-income residents free transportation to landfills and/or reduced disposal fees may help

to reduce illegal dumping. Additional transfer stations or drop-off sites, as well as improved communication regarding illegal dumping offense reporting and fines/penalties may also be helpful.

## Resources

United States Environmental Protection Agency (1998). "Region 5 Illegal Dumping Prevention Guidebook." Publication Number EPA905-B-97-001. Online. Available at: [http://www.epa.gov/reg5rcra/wptdiv/illegal\\_dumping/downloads/il-dmpng.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/reg5rcra/wptdiv/illegal_dumping/downloads/il-dmpng.pdf).

For more information on illegal dumping clean-up and volunteer activities in Utah view the national public lands day website at: [http://www.publiclandsday.org/pre\\_reg.htm](http://www.publiclandsday.org/pre_reg.htm).

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This publication is issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Noelle E. Cockett, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.