



## Resident Perceptions of Illegal Dumping In Northern Nevada

**Margaret W. Cowee**, Research Analyst, Department of Resource Economics, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada, Reno

**Kynda R. Curtis**, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Applied Economics, Utah State University

### Introduction

Approximately 86 percent of Nevada's land mass is 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 on private or public lands, 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 (Fig. 1). 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 be exposed to chemicals. Additionally, lost revenue in the form of foregone dumping fees and vehicle scrapping (metal and parts) may result.

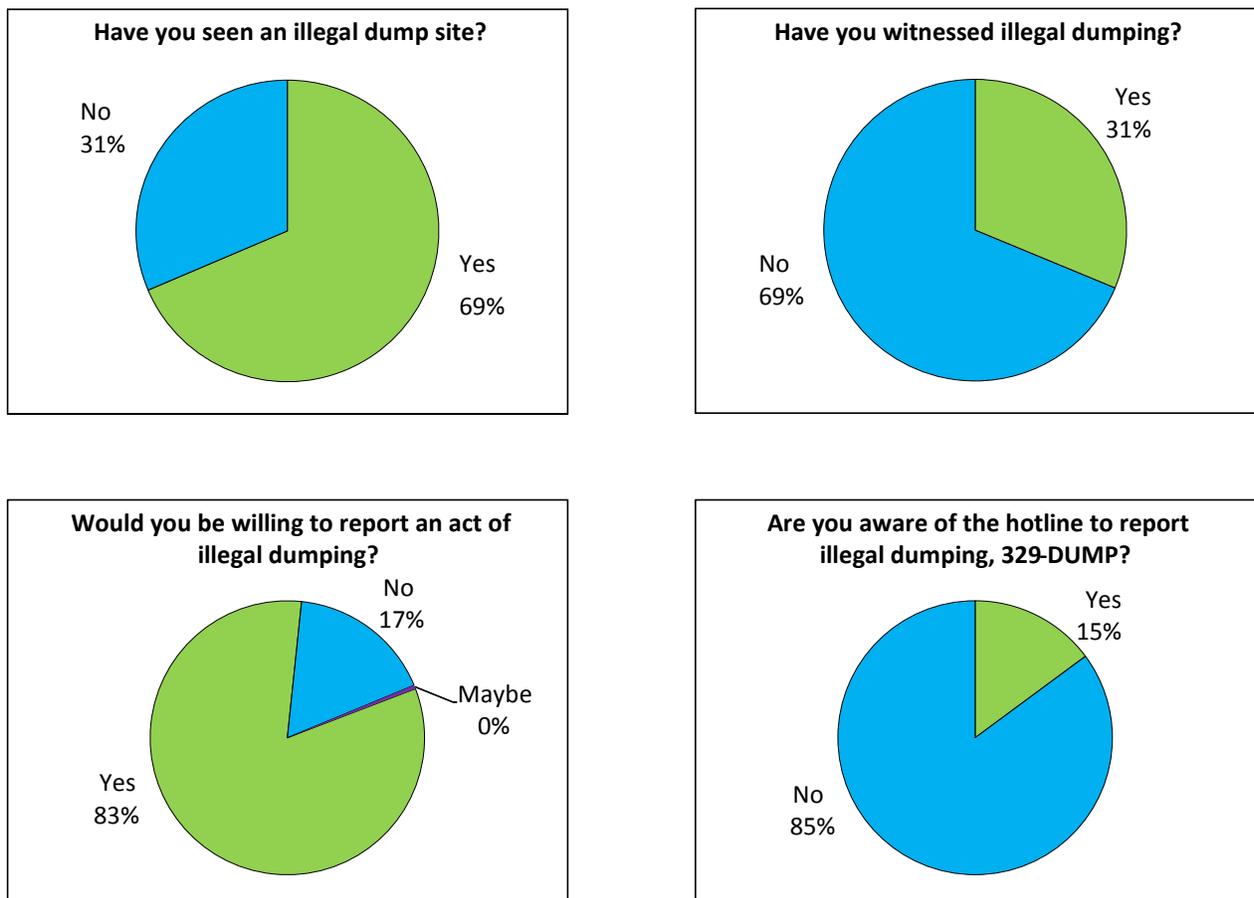
**Fig. 1: Typical Example of Illegal Dumping on Nevada's Public Lands**



Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful (KTMB), a northern Nevada nonprofit agency dedicated to creating a cleaner, more beautiful region through education and community involvement, has collected 330 tons of trash from public spaces since the organization began its annual Great Truckee Meadows Cleanup program in 2006. In an effort to better understand the motivations

behind illegal dumping and to assess resident perceptions of illegal dumping in northern Nevada, KTMB approached researchers in the University of Nevada, Reno’s Department of Resource Economics to ask for their assistance in creating and administering a resident survey. Researchers created a student service learning project in which students in a 100-level resource economics class during the fall of 2009 studied the economic and environmental issues surrounding illegal dumping, conducted an in-person survey of 452 northern Nevada residents, and presented the results by Zip Code to KTMB and members of the Illegal Dumping Task Force. This publication provides an overview of selected survey results, as well as further information about illegal dumping resources in northern Nevada.

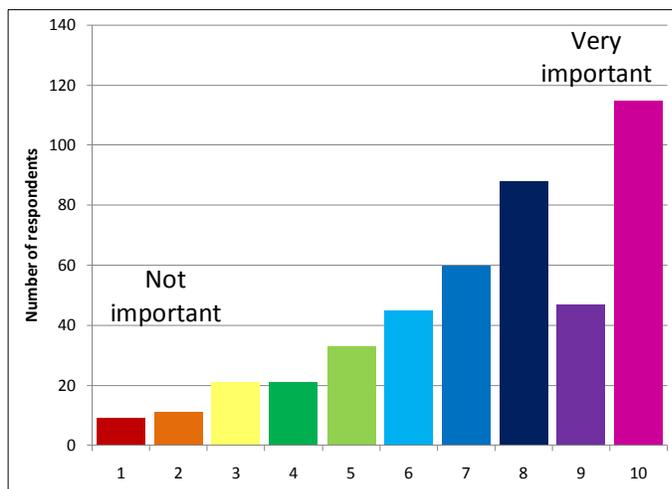
**Fig. 2: What is your experience with illegal dumping?**



Survey respondents were asked to provide some information about their previous experiences with illegal dumping. When asked if they had ever seen an illegal dump site, 69 percent of respondents (310 respondents) said they had seen a dump site, while the other 31 percent (142 respondents) said they had not (Fig. 2). When asked if they had ever witnessed an act of illegal dumping, 31 percent of respondents (141 respondents) said they had witnessed an act of illegal dumping, while the other 69 percent (310 respondents) said they had not. When respondents were asked if they would be willing to report an act of illegal dumping, 83 percent

(372 respondents) said they would be willing, 17 percent (77 respondents) said they would not, and less than 1 percent (2 respondents) said they would consider it. When asked if they were aware of the Illegal Dumping Hotline to report illegal dumping, 85 percent of respondents (383 respondents) said they were not aware of the hotline, while the other 15 percent (65 respondents) said they were aware of the hotline.

**Fig. 3: How important do you find the elimination of illegal dumping in northern Nevada?**



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

**Table 1: Why do you think people choose to dump illegally?**

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/Ignorence/Don't think it's bad	6%

Survey respondents were presented with a list of potential reasons why people dump illegally rather than using legal options (Table 1). While more than half of the respondents indicated that illegal disposal was related to high fees and distance, 40 percent thought illegal disposal was due to a lack of proper transportation, and more than a third of all respondents thought 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.

**Table 2: How well do you understand your Waste Management services?**

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%

Survey respondents were presented with a list of statements regarding Waste Management services in northern Nevada and were asked to indicate whether the statement was true or false (Table 2). In all cases, the statement was true. The results indicate that 39 to 55 percent of survey respondents were unaware of specific 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 percent of respondents thought people dump illegally because the disposal fees are too high, and this quiz indicates that 40 percent of respondents did not know that Lockwood Landfill hosts free dump days.

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

If you witness an act of illegal dumping or come across an existing illegal dumpsite on public property, call the Washoe County Sheriff’s Illegal Dumping Hotline, (775) 329-DUMP. 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 you not confront the offender, because you may run the risk of putting yourself in danger. Illegal dumping on private property in Washoe County can be reported to the City of Reno at (775) 334-4636 and to the City of Sparks at (775) 353-2384.

**Where can I find more information about community cleanups in the Reno area?**

KTMB hosts a website that lists all of its programs and provides information about upcoming events ([www.ktmb.org](http://www.ktmb.org)). KTMB also has a blog featuring further information about cleanup efforts and community events, as well as links to all of its sponsors ([www.blogktmb.org](http://www.blogktmb.org)). KTMB can also be reached by phone at (775) 851-5185.

A similar version of this publication “Resident Perceptions of Illegal Dumping on Public Lands” is available through Utah State Extension, publication Economics/Applied Economics/2010-02pr.

Copyright © 2010 University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

The University of Nevada, Reno is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, creed, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation in any program or activity it operates. The University of Nevada employs only United States citizens and aliens lawfully authorized to work in the United States.