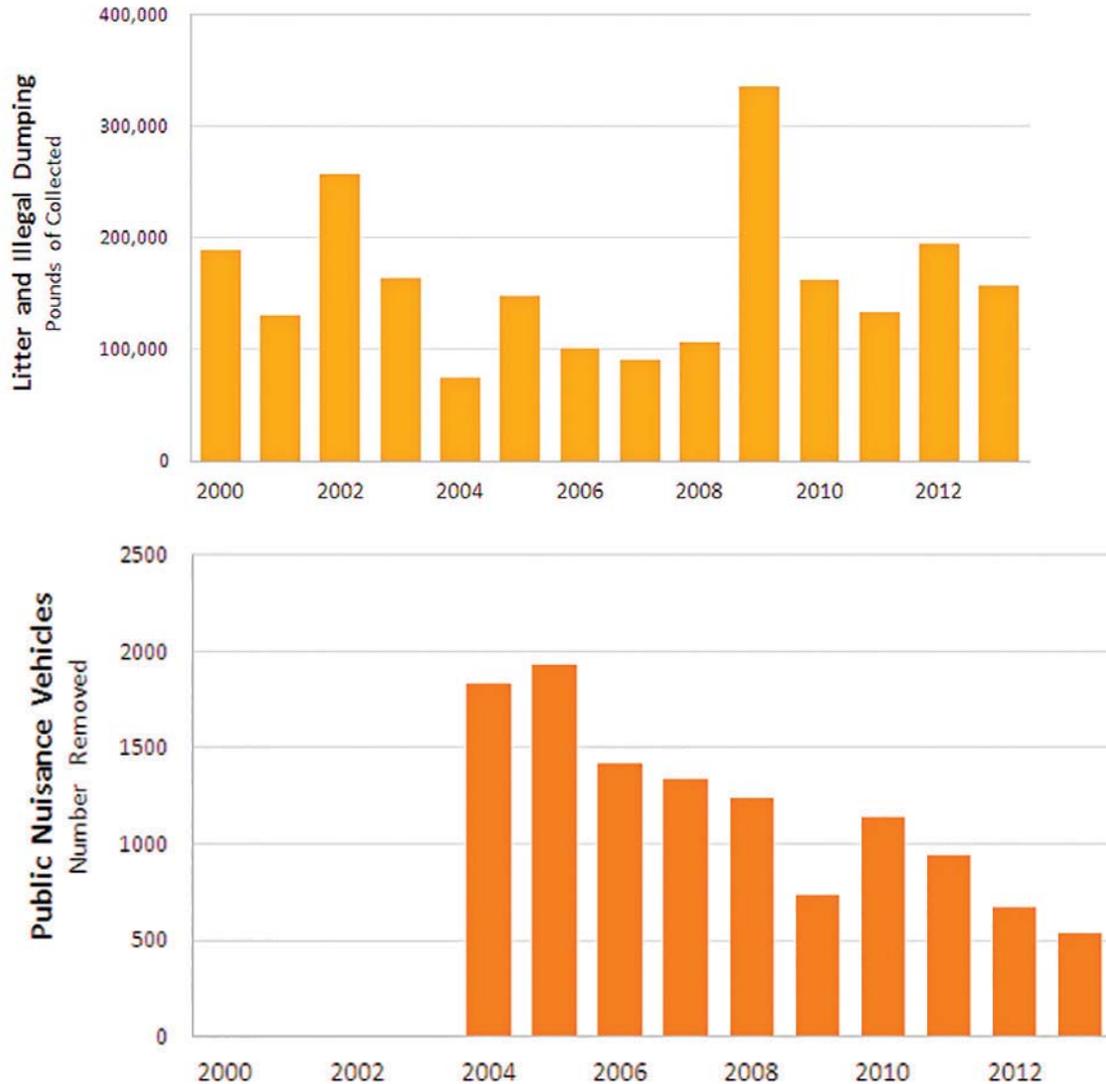




Waste

Litter, Illegal Dumping, and Public Nuisance Vehicles



Data Source: Washington State Department of Ecology and Pierce County Responds.

Litter, illegal dumping, and abandoned and junk vehicles continue to be a problem. State budgets limit the pounds of litter collected.

WHY CARE?

Hazards

- Traffic hazards to drivers, bicyclists, and walkers from garbage in roadways, trails, and sidewalks.
- Rats, mosquitoes, and other creatures attracted by garbage and stagnant water may carry diseases.
- Medical waste, needles and other sharp materials, asbestos, chemicals, and other dangerous objects.
- Toxic chemicals from lead-acid batteries, mercury switches, and other garbage may seep into soil, groundwater, rivers, lakes, and the Puget Sound.
- Flooding when garbage blocks ditches, creeks, culverts, and drainage systems.
- Fires from spontaneous combustion of flammable materials or arson.
- Other forms of illegal activity attracted to area.¹

Exposure

- Children playing nearby may be injured by sharp objects and other hazardous materials.
- Children and adults may be bitten by rats or mosquitoes attracted by waste.
- Drinking or swimming in contaminated waters and eating contaminated seafood.

Human health impacts

- Burns and bites, and mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile Virus and encephalitis.
- Long-term risks from exposure to hazardous materials include cancer and neurological damage.

Who's most vulnerable?¹

- Children are most vulnerable to the hazardous chemicals and materials, and can be attracted by items.
- Communities with many rentals and residents who have less stake in their communities.
- Lower-income communities where people have limited access to convenient and affordable waste disposal and recycling services.
- Communities with foreclosed homes, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, rivers, forested land, rural roads and railways with poor lighting attract illegal dumping. Dump sites are magnets for additional dumping and criminal activity.

Economic impacts

- Illegal dumping, abandoned vehicles, and litter lower property values and discourage development, resulting in lost fees and tax revenue.
- Pierce County spent more than 10 years and \$1 million cleaning up the Connells Prairie illegal dump site, near Lake Tapps. Pierce County spent about \$110,000 on cleanup activities in 2013, excluding staff costs.
- Pierce County Responds, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, and cities respond to thousands of complaints every year by inspecting sites and helping property owners clean up sites.
- Illegal dumping makes up 5-15% of Joint Base Lewis-McChord's waste stream and costs over \$500,000 annually.²

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Policy actions

- Since 2005 companies hauling recyclable materials are required to register with Washington State Department of Ecology and take materials to a recycling facility. Several of Pierce County's "Dirty Dozen" illegal dumpsites were associated with "sham" recyclers, such as the Connells Prairie example above.



Litter crew picking up a plastic water bottle.

- Since 2004 Pierce County single-stream curbside recycling made recycling easier. Illegal dumping may increase as disposal costs increase, however.
- In 2014 Pierce County adopted parts of the International Property Maintenance Code, making it easier to address problem properties.

Personal actions

We need your help to prevent and report dumping before it gets out of hand.

- Share the "broken windows theory" that cleaning up and taking care of neighborhoods helps prevent future dumping and other crimes.
- Organize a cleanup—contact code compliance or enforcement staff in the city you live in.
- Adopt a Highway—promote local pride while saving taxpayers' money. Find out how at www.wsdot.wa.gov/operations/adoptahwy/ or (253) 983-7550.
- Report illegal dumping and problem properties ASAP to Pierce County Responds at (253) 798-4636, to (253) 591-5001 in Tacoma, or to code enforcement staff in the city where you live.

Properly dispose of your household products.

- Find out where to safely dispose of:
 - Oil and other household hazardous waste at www.piercecountywa.org/hhw and www.tpchd.org/hazwaste.
 - Medications at www.takebackyourmeds.org.
- Find out where to recycle:
 - TVs, computers, and other electronics at www.ecyclewashington.org.
 - Other items at www.piercecountywa.org/recycling.
- Hire legitimate companies or individuals to haul waste. Find out how by calling Pierce County Solid Waste at (253) 798-2179.

Tacoma neighborhood groups and city staff hosted 16 community cleanups and hauled away 453 tons of garbage in 2013.³

1 EPA Illegal Dumping Prevention Guidebook, March 1998.

2 January 2008 email from Ken Smith, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Program Manager, Fort Lewis Public Works Environmental Division.

3 City of Tacoma Community Cleanup Program webpage.