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ILLEGAL TRASH DUMPING

in Saint Louis, MO



WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

People dump their trash, construction and demolition waste, old tires, and many other items in alleyways and vacant lots in Saint Louis City to avoid paying for disposal. Trash can contain substances **harmful to the environment and human health**—chemicals, asbestos, lead paint, plastic, and other particulates.



WHO IS AFFECTED?

Areas in the City with high vacancy rates are often the targets of illegal dumping. These areas are mostly **low-income and over 97% BIPOC**. In addition to causing health risks, dumping decreases property rates, costs taxpayers for cleanup, and decreases community pride.



WHAT ARE PEOPLE DOING ABOUT IT?

The City has created the **Environmental Investigations Unit** to prioritize trash-dumping cases by fining perpetrators and putting cameras in high-risk areas. Many **community organizations** have begun to tackle the problem, such as the Dutchtown South Community Corporation's cleanup initiatives.



WHAT CAN I DO?

-  **Report** illegal trash dumping to the Citizens' Service Bureau at 314-622-4800.
-  **Participate** in trash-pickup initiatives from local community leaders!
-  **Show your community pride!** Saint Louis City is so much more than a place to leave trash. Coming together and celebrating our communities proves that!

SOURCES

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In Saint Louis, Missouri, illegal trash dumping is a huge problem. Many individuals and businesses dump their trash, tires, or construction material in or nearby private dumpsters or on abandoned lots. This can cause numerous health hazards due to the disposal of sharp materials, chemicals, and harmful construction and demolition waste, such as asbestos and lead paint (“Environmental Racism” 22, “Illegal Disposal”). Of course, the waste is also very toxic to the environment. This illegal dumping costs taxpayers and lowers property values. The scale of the issue is very large as well-- in 2017, 22,000 tons of trash were dumped illegally, while only 9,000 tons were properly disposed of at the appropriate facilities (“Environmental Racism” 22).

Illegal dumping is primarily impacting residents of the northern part of the city, where there is a high number of vacant lots. According to the EJ atlas, this area is predominantly low-income. The blocks with the highest number of vacancies are also 95.5% BIPOC (Feller). Redlining, gentrification, and a lack of investors have contributed to the vacancy problem and poor living conditions, with high rates of mold, lead paint, and air pollution (“Environmental Racism” 21). Trash dumping has the insidious effect of lowering community pride as well.

I live in south Saint Louis County. When I go into the city, there is a pretty noticeable divide between predominantly white areas, which are receiving new investors and construction, and areas with a much higher concentration of low-income people of color, stereotyped as being ‘unsafe’ and containing many abandoned properties. I wasn’t aware of the scale of illegal dumping before researching it, but members of nearby communities have, and have begun to form organizations such as the Arch City Defenders and Dutchtown South Community Corporation (Schoenherr).

The city government has also taken action by creating an Environmental Investigation Unit (EIU) of the police department to specifically work on trash dumping cases (KMOV). Recently, fines have increased from \$500 to \$1000 for illegal dumping, and the EIU has installed hundreds of infrared cameras in alleyways where dumping has been a problem. Community action by reporting incidents at the Citizens’ Service Bureau has been a tremendous help to the EIU (KMOV).

If it were up to me to find a solution to this problem, I would continue the EIU’s work in penalizing trash dumpers and rewarding witnesses. Many people form groups to pick up the litter, which is also wonderful. However, I think more can be done with community education about the issue. Many of the articles I read mentioned that dumpers failed to see the value in the communities they left their waste in. Investors also seem to not see this value, and even members of the community are demoralized enough by the constant barrage of trash that they often don’t report it (“Environmental Racism” 23). Some communities, like Dutchtown, have started initiatives to increase community pride. Movements like that and community-wide events should be encouraged.

More preventative measures could be put in place to prevent people from dumping illegally in the first place as well. Business leaders, contractors, and construction supervisors, and any other third parties involved in waste disposal could be required to attend a training session or forum about the effects of trash dumping on communities and issues of redlining in Saint Louis.

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