

Neighborly Advice Against Illegal Dumping

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

As mentioned in the article, "[IMA's Progress](#)," illegally dumping trash—especially yard debris—onto parkland continues. Here is the funny part: who the culprits are becomes pretty obvious when they chuck the trash over their fence and onto park property for everyone else to see. These piles broadcast to both neighbors and visitors a lack of care by the dumping households. The detrimental impacts of this practice include mounds that build up faster than they can decompose, smothering native plants, and polluting waterways when it occurs near streams and flood zones (yes, even grass clippings near runoffs add excessive nutrients to water). Unfortunately, some folks still might care only about direct, personal impacts. Those people might like to know that termites are ubiquitous in Northern Virginia, and smart people try not to have rotting wood piles near their property, which invites these ravenous insects closer to home. Also, any drying leaf-and-branch heaps are giant tinderboxes... and last year we had an arson-based forest fire approach residential housing. Forest fires may start naturally (lightning strikes) or through irresponsible human activity (illegal campfires, setting off fireworks, playing with matches), all of which were observed in local parks. Knowing that there is a genuine fire risk, do people honestly want to load their property line or surrounding woodlands with fuel piles? These points are not to invoke fear, only intelligent preparedness.

We can hope that by now in this reading, those who have dumped will listen to reason and lawfully dispose of rubbish. Fairfax County works with other park neighbors to clean parklands. For those who continue illegal dumping, I do not know if the County will prosecute those individuals. I do know that within KPW, the County documented both the debris piles and at times the actual people in the midst of dumping. You might be interested to know that in a new, neighboring development, Fairfax County cited a property owner for, among other infractions, making a fire pit on parkland, but that was settled out of court. If the County decides to prosecute people illegally dumping anything on park property, the guilty parties get to lighten the wallet up to \$1,000.00 and/or win a 30-day vacation in jail. In the end, bagging and bundling for curbside recycling or composting in your yard is easiest for everyone.

This brief article scarcely scratches the surface as illegal dumping ramifications can fill volumes, so here is the bottom line: everyone needs to exhibit responsible behavior. Living next to woodlands does not grant anyone a special privilege to dump. If you dumped debris, kindly clean up your mess. People, personal property, and the environment will benefit from folks legally and responsibly disposing of refuse.

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