

CITY OF PALMDALE ILLEGAL MATTRESS DUMPING PILOT PROJECT

In July 2020, Mattress Recycling Council (MRC) invited the 21 Illegally Dumped Mattress Collection Initiative (Initiative) participants with the highest per capita rates of illegal mattress dumping to apply for illegal dumping pilot study funding. MRC awarded funds to the City of Palmdale, California, for a project that focused on increasing bulky item collections at multifamily housing complexes and working with a community-based social marketing consultant to implement a citywide outreach campaign.

The Problem

The City of Palmdale found illegal dumping a problem, particularly, at multifamily housing complexes. One of the steps the City took to mitigate the issue occurred in 2018. The City's new franchise agreement designated multifamily housing complexes as residential units rather than commercial entities, entitling residents living in the complexes to one free bulky item collection per year, along with regular trash pickup. After reviewing several years of data, The City found the program was not being used to its full potential. Few multifamily complex residents were participating and they did not always have accurate information about the no-cost bulky item collection opportunity.

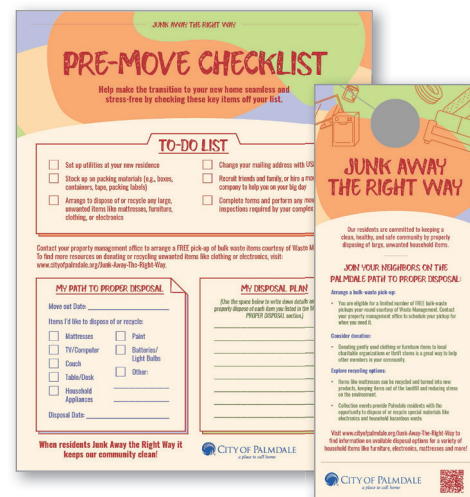
How the City Addressed the Problem

With a funding award from the Mattress Recycling Council, the City implemented a pilot program to increase awareness about bulky item collection and reduce the number of illegally dumped mattresses.

In Phase 1 of the effort, the City analyzed existing data to understand the types of materials dumped, hot spot locations and demographics. The City also reviewed existing outreach materials (website, social media, etc.) and waste hauler offerings.

Phase 2 included a literature review to identify perceived barriers to responsible mattress disposal. That information was in, turn, used to create a brief survey to gather data from residents of multifamily complexes.

In Phase 3, the City utilized the survey results from Phase 2 to design the “Junk Away the Right Way” campaign and determined which multifamily complexes would make the best target audience. Using information provided by its hauler and a heat map of illegal dumping data, the City selected multifamily complexes that were located near illegal dumping hot spots and had a history of overloading waste enclosures with excess bulky items. At these complexes, the City provided a move-out checklist and door hangers to be distributed when residents were most likely to be disposing of used mattresses (moving in/moving out times and spring cleaning).



In Phase 4, the City implemented a broad web and social media campaign to educate Palmdale residents and raise awareness. The City developed a website landing page devoted to illegal dumping issues and offered resources, including downloadable flyers/toolkits for multifamily properties, tools for reporting illegal dumping, information on self-hauling to landfills, and dates and times of collection events and bulky item pickups.

The City also created a series of 12 social media messages for distribution through its existing social channels. In addition, it created an advertising wrap for its lightning loader vehicle, which goes out into the City daily to pick up illegally dumped items. The vehicle wrap included the campaign tagline and QR code/link to the new webpage.

Lessons Learned

A multichannel campaign is imperative. Residents should be given digital and non-digital opportunities to learn the information. Property managers and their on-site staff also need time to understand the content and significance of the campaign before being expected to inform their tenants.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Citywide Outreach

Palmdale's "Junk Away The Right Way" campaign reached a broad audience of renters and homeowners. The viewer of the social media content or advertisement on the lightning loader could instantly connect to the City's website via a link or QR code.

Disadvantages are that some residents may not use social media or know how to scan a QR code. Other residents may not follow the City's social media, and some may not have access to the internet or social media at all. When communicating to a broad audience, consider a mix of digital and non-digital methods to convey the information.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Multifamily Complex Outreach

Palmdale's multifamily complex outreach relied on property managers distributing a move-out checklist and door hanger at peak mattress disposal times.

An advantage to this approach is that it is proactive. The checklist and door hanger prompt the resident to make a plan ahead of their move out date and provides information about proper disposal methods.

However, the outreach is most effective when materials are distributed at the right time and those distributing the information are able and willing to help. Immediate participation from property managers or their staff should not be assumed. Take extra time to educate property managers and explain the campaign's purpose prior to expecting materials to be distributed.

Other Obstacles

During Phase 2, the City faced difficulties in gathering survey data from residents of multifamily complexes. Initially, the City received six out of 300 distributed surveys. To address this, the City conducted door-to-door visits and completed an additional 19 surveys. The City also collected 10 more responses through social media. In total, the City evaluated 35 surveys.

Recruiting property managers to take part in the pilot program also proved challenging. Out of the 20 multifamily complexes contacted, only six were willing to participate. During follow-up calls with the participating complexes, the City noticed that on-site staff were often unaware of the program, hindering delivery of outreach material.

What the City Accomplished

Overall, the City found that low resident participation and inaccurate information were the greatest barriers to the proper disposal and recycling of mattresses. Its direct outreach to multifamily complexes and broader awareness campaign targeting all Palmdale residents sought to address both barriers.

Ultimately, the outreach materials generated 2,318 landing page views. Following the awareness campaign, the City measured the number of pickup requests and illegally dumped mattresses collected near the complexes and compared it to baseline data from 2021. The results showed an increase of seven pickups and 14 illegally dumped mattresses.

While the effort did not immediately decrease illegal dumping, Palmdale identified important insights to improve future communication with multifamily housing complex property managers and their tenants. For example, the City determined that securing buy-in from property managers before asking them to distribute materials would have been more effective.

Palmdale continues to monitor illegal dumping at multifamily complexes and promote the "Junk Away the Right Way" campaign by using vehicle wraps on waste hauler trucks, and sharing proper waste disposal information through social media and at events.

Mattresses Captured at Participating Apartment Complexes

Period: Feb. 1 – July 31	2021	2022
Bulky Item Mattress Pickups at Participating Apartment Complexes	9	16
Illegally Dumped Mattresses Collected/ Recycled From the Area Participating Apartment Complexes	87	101