

## VENTURA COUNTY

### Illegal Dumping Pilot Surveillance & Outreach Program

*Ventura County in California has long faced challenges with illegal dumping, particularly of mattresses.*

*Following the underperformance of an earlier surveillance-based strategy to combat illegal dumping, the County turned to the Mattress Recycling Council (MRC) for assistance. The County received funding from MRC in 2022 to launch an updated program including advanced surveillance equipment, improved data collection practices, and a robust education campaign. This pilot program ran from June 2022 to June 2024.*

#### Executive Summary

When the target area was subject to video surveillance, the illegal dumping stopped. However, both the early County program and the MRC-funded pilot were hampered by vandalism to the surveillance cameras. To continue using cameras at hot spots, the County must adopt measures to prevent equipment theft and vandalism. The education efforts did not reduce illegal dumping in those areas without cameras.

#### Background

In 2019, the County's Public Works Agency formed a Lean Six Sigma and Kaizen event involving key stakeholders, including the Sheriff's and District Attorney's Offices, to develop strategies to address illegal dumping.

Following these discussions, the County launched its first pilot program using its own funds to deploy surveillance equipment at known illegal dumping hot spots. The goal was to identify, deter and prosecute illegal dumpers. It was hoped the program would reduce disposal fees and labor costs associated with cleaning up illegally dumped materials.

While the County's initial pilot captured 51 incidents, because of poor photo quality, only three were prosecuted.

#### Program Elements and Design

Recognizing the limitations of the initial pilot, the County sought opportunities to strengthen its enforcement tools. With funding support from MRC, the County was able to upgrade surveillance technology. In addition, the County worked with a third-party brand development agency,

Consortium Media, to launch a corresponding outreach campaign.

The surveillance equipment was mounted on a mobile trailer on Olds Road, a well-known illegal dumping hot spot in Oxnard. Signs warning of prosecution for illegal dumping were also placed near the cameras.

The County's outreach campaign, "Don't Dump on VC" targeted Central and Southern areas of the county. The campaign messages in both English and Spanish encouraged visiting the County's website. The county used social media, newspapers and digital news platforms to reach its targeted audience.



#### Program Results

Mobile surveillance cameras were installed along Olds Road to monitor illegal dumping and results were largely effective. The cameras recorded daily footage at known dumping sites and documented several incidents. In some cases, license plates were captured; however, image quality was often too poor to clearly identify vehicles or individuals. Additionally, because dumpers frequently concealed their identities, no incidents were referred to the Sheriff's Office for enforcement.

Even without prosecution, the presence of surveillance proved to be a strong deterrent. Illegal dumping in the monitored area declined sharply following installation, underscoring the value of the approach. The project concluded in June 2024, with data reported through that period.

Table 1: Illegal Dumping Incidents on Olds Road

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Incidents	17	13	4	3	0

Data presented correspond to the reporting period ending June 2024.

The effort also faced other operational challenges. Supply chain delays postponed equipment installation, and vandals targeted the cameras on two separate occasions by cutting electrical harnesses and spray-painting a unit. Although these events were captured on video, the individuals responsible could not be identified. County staff also noted that hardwiring utility poles with lighting would significantly improve camera clarity and exposure of activity, helping address one of the technical limitations of the cameras.

While the Olds Road surveillance successfully eliminated illegal dumping in the targeted area, the overall number of illegal dumping incidents across the county did not decline. Still, these results highlight the potential for targeted surveillance to prevent dumping in key hot spots.

Table 2: Ventura County's Illegally Dumped Mattress Collection Initiative Data

Calendar Year	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Units Reported	326	199	161	196

Data shown for June 2020- June 2024, allowing for full calendar year comparison from project start to completion.

Outreach

Between November and December 2022, prior to the camera installation, the County launched its education and outreach campaign to raise awareness and deter dumping. The outreach directed the audience to an informational page on the County's website. The effort generated 263,761 impressions with more than 3,000 users clicking through to the informational page, and the social media content receiving over 4,000 likes or shares. Posts created for Spanish-speaking communities reached over 55,000 people and received over 2,800 clicks. While English posts reached over 25,000 people and generated 228 clicks. View the County's information page: <https://publicworks.venturacounty.gov/dont-dump-on-me-vc/>

Resources

Best Practices in Addressing Illegal Dumping of Durable Waste - A Guide for Policy Makers

Case Studies From Other MRC-funded Projects

Conclusions

Surveillance can be an effective deterrent for illegal dumping, but effective strategies are needed to discourage or prevent theft and vandalism of equipment. The County learned two practical lessons from implementing the pilot program on Olds Road:

- While the surveillance equipment was a good deterrent, the County determined that it could benefit from a third camera monitoring the others. This camera would record any vandalism. In this scenario the cost-benefit ratio needs to be evaluated.
- County officials also learned that surveillance trailers must be immobilized to deter potential thieves.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the County plans to discuss whether to purchase additional surveillance equipment, including dummy equipment to deter illegal dumping. They will also evaluate whether the Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office, Environmental Task Force, and area landowners could play a larger role in helping the Public Works Agency catch offenders. The County also intends to continue placing signs warning of prosecution for illegal dumping in hot spots.

MRC's Observations

Although the project only showed a slight decrease of illegal dumping in the county, it provides valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of various illegal dumping mitigation strategies. The Ventura County program was the second MRC surveillance and outreach project. The City of San Jose also used MRC funding to successfully implement a surveillance program at four multifamily dwelling sites, which was also combined with a multilingual outreach campaign.

Local enforcement has proven to be an increasingly effective strategy for curbing illegal dumping, and experiences of the City of San Jose and Ventura County provide valuable insights for other jurisdictions to avoid costly missteps.

MRC is encouraged by the main lessons learned by Ventura County officials over the course of the pilot project and their determination to evaluate the costs and benefits of public education and surveillance efforts in illegal dumping hot spots throughout the county.