

SAN BENITO COUNTY

Illegal Mattress Dumping Drops 35% in Pilot Study

Overview

Prior to partnering with the Mattress Recycling Council, the San Benito County Integrated Waste Management Regional Agency, led by the County of San Benito and including the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, had an established illegal dumping abatement program in place. To boost engagement in its illegal dumping mitigation efforts, the county participated in a pilot project with MRC from May 2024 to May 2025 to further reduce illegal mattress dumping by expanding on its education and outreach strategies, raising awareness of its resources, and no-cost collection opportunities.

Executive Summary

During the 12-month pilot, the county achieved measurable progress in reducing illegal mattress dumping and increasing proper disposal.

Reported illegal dumping of mattresses declined by 35.4%, from 113 incidents in 2023 to 73 in 2024. In 2025, illegal dumping incidents totaled 89, remaining well below the 2023 baseline, indicating continued improvement beyond the initial pilot year.

Residential use of the county's no-cost mattress collection site also remained steady relative to the 2023 baseline of 4,572 mattresses. Residents dropped off 4,677 mattresses in 2024 and 4,342 units in 2025, reflecting consistent participation throughout and following the pilot period.

Additionally, compared to the 2023 baseline, participation at bulky item collection events increased by 14.5%, from 690 participants in 2023 to 790 participants in 2025.

Targeted outreach and deterrence strategies supported the pilot's outcomes. Outreach in high-dumping areas increased awareness of free disposal options, anti-dumping signage reduced dumping at most locations (with surveillance added where needed), and in-person outreach at multi-family dwellings generated strong survey results, also yielding higher participation in recycling programs. Cart hanger distribution further reinforced messaging and program awareness.

The Problem

The county offers a multitude of resources to its residents to reduce waste and encourage proper disposal of bulky items, but these have been underutilized. With funding from the MRC, the county's goal was to increase residential awareness of its mattress collection opportunities and to encourage behavior change while reducing illegal dumping.

The Pilot Program

The county launched an outreach campaign that included the following elements:

- Four countywide direct mailers to residents
- Door-to-door outreach at multi-family dwellings
- Anti-dumping signs at identified hot spots
- Cart hangers distributed to single-family dwellings
- All outreach materials were in both English and Spanish.

Direct Mailers

A quarterly postcard, each with specific messaging, was sent to every county resident through USPS Every Door Direct Mail promoting the free mattress drop-off collection at the John Smith Landfill. Two of the mailers also promoted the county's quarterly bulky item collection events, and one provided education on the newly established illegal dumping fines of up to \$10,000.



In-Person Outreach

County staff, working with Recology, sponsored four community events. Three were held at apartment complexes and one at a food bank. In addition, the county with Recology visited 45 multifamily complexes and surveyed residents about their knowledge of the county's recycling and disposal services. Out of the 361 units visited, the county received responses from 121 residents.

Survey results revealed that 97.5% of respondents learned something new about the county's programs and services, highlighting a clear gap in public awareness regarding the free resources available. These insights underscore the importance of continued outreach and education.

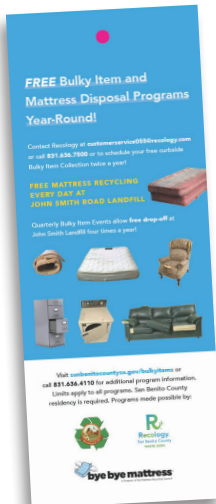
Cart Hanger Campaign

The county printed 10,000 cart hangers, which included key information on the bulky item collections and mattress disposal program:

- **Recology's curbside bulky items collection**
- **Free mattress recycling at John Smith Road Landfill**
- **Quarterly bulky item events at John Smith Road Landfill**

The cart hangers are attached to Recology waste bins, and to date, 8,000 have been distributed along eleven Recology routes in Hollister.

After the initial launch of the outreach campaign, the county reports that the number of participants in Recology's curbside bulky item collection program increased 60% between 2023 and 2025, from 1,126 to 1,800. The county plans to continue distributing cart hangers monthly in targeted zip codes.



Anti-Dumping Signs

The outreach efforts were supplemented by the installation of 30 anti-dumping signs at 15 dumping hotspots across four zip codes. The signs warned of fees of up to \$10,000. Posting signs proved effective in reducing illegal dumping at all but one location; there, the county installed a surveillance camera, which led to a significant reduction in illegal dumping.



Challenges

Outreach to multi-family dwellings required more time and coordination than initially anticipated, primarily due to varying levels of engagement from property managers and access limitations at certain complexes. These experiences highlighted the importance of early stakeholder coordination and establishing clear access protocols prior to implementation. In addition, in-person outreach, cart hanger distribution, and camera maintenance required early operational adjustments to better align staffing and logistics. These adjustments underscored the need for flexible deployment planning and contingency resources to support field operations during rollout phases.



Lessons Learned

Based upon the pilot's efforts and successes, the county identified several recommendations:

- **Increase frequency and visibility**
 - *Repeated messaging across multiple media channels increased visibility of free disposal options and reinforced awareness over time, leading to higher participation rates.*
- **Layered deterrence approach**
 - *Combine the use of warning signs and video surveillance in locations with repeated dumping occurrences.*
- **Regularly evaluate and adjust**
 - *Evaluate the effectiveness of outreach efforts and illegal dumping deterrence through assessing different outreach methods, messaging, and enforcement visibility.*
- **Implement bulky item collections at multifamily dwellings**
 - *The county identified a gap in equitable disposal access for multifamily dwellings, driven by transportation barriers and limited bulky item collection services, highlighting the need to expand service availability.*
- **Continuing partnership with Recology**
 - *Strong partnerships were essential to effective outreach, service delivery, and resident education.*

Looking Forward

The county will continue to apply lessons learned from the pilot to strengthen its long-term strategy to mitigate illegal dumping. Feedback gathered during in-person outreach at multifamily dwellings identified a clear need for bulky-item disposal options, particularly for residents facing transportation or access barriers. In response, a new county funded program, a bulky item collection service for multifamily dwellings that includes mattress collection with an effort to recycle all recoverable units, was introduced after the pilot concluded.

To date, events have been held at six complexes serving 40 participants and collecting 60 bulky items. Early participation levels indicate strong resident interest and validate the need for continued support. Moving forward, the county will assess opportunities with Recology to expand this service model, strengthen coordination with property managers and Recology, and prioritize equitable access to disposal services as part of its broader illegal dumping mitigation strategy.

