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Illegal dump sites cost JBLM big bucks to clean up

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Sometimes one man's trash isn't another man's treasure — sometimes it's just trash.

An estimated 20 percent of Joint Base Lewis-McChord's waste bill can be attributed to trash from off-base. Illegal dumping on JBLM costs the installation more than \$350,000 a year, but thanks to the cooperative efforts of JBLM environmental investigator, Greg Mason, recycling outreach coordinators, JBLM law enforcement, staff judge advocate office and service members, this number is going down.

Eleven years ago, before the JBLM Illegal Dumping Program was in place, it was easier for someone from on or off base to dump their personal trash on base without someone noticing or taking action.

"Now there's someone actively working these sites, and we'll go after them financially or sometimes even criminally," Mason said.

Dump sites located on JBLM often contain clues, such as an envelope with a name and address left on it, that lead Mason, also known as the "Trash Cop," to the dumper. Mason then works with the staff judge advocate to fine the perpetrator — \$12,000 in one instance.

Occurrences of illegal dumping happen both in the training areas and in the cantonment area. The trash bill for Joint Base Lewis-McChord is paid by the pound, so while that small bag of trash from home may seem harmless, it can really add up.

In addition to the investigations, Mason organizes a biannual JBLM Pride Week where service members work with JBLM environmental to clean up dump sites in training areas. The May 2016 JBLM Pride Week generated 41 tons of illegally dumped refuse collected from range areas on JBLM, 55 percent of this was recycled saving the base disposal costs and generating recycling revenue.

In the past 11 years, the amount of waste found during JBLM Pride Week has plummeted from an average of 119 tons to an average of 59 tons per event, evidencing the success of JBLM's illegal dumping enforcement efforts.

JBLM recycling outreach coordinators also assist in JBLM Pride Week cleanup efforts and want to assist service members participating in recycling everything that can be.

"Please put things in the proper containers: recyclables in recycling containers and trash in the dumpsters," said Tammy Shoop, a JBLM recycling outreach coordinator. "Leaves, yard waste and dirt need to go to JBLM's composting facility, Earthworks, or the (JBLM) Pride Week consolidated collection point. Putting these items in recycling containers or dumpsters is extremely costly for JBLM."

They are also willing to provide extra recycling containers temporarily for large clean outs.

In addition to saving money, the program also improves the service members' ability to train. The amount of trash in the training areas is reduced so the service member can focus on training, not avoiding dump sites.

Mason voiced his frustration over service members needing to dedicate time to cleaning these sites.

“We (at JBLM Public Works, Environmental) are diligently working to reduce the trash found on JBLM so the service members don’t have to clean it up,” Mason said. “They shouldn’t have to — that’s not their mission.”

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