



My name is Kristina Brown. For nearly three years I've tried to expose the illegal dumping of solid waste and contaminated mulch in the high desert of LA County from the City of LA.

LA Public Works is currently evaluating RFPs from the City's big-six waste haulers before deciding on which companies will be granted new contracts. Two of the companies bidding are Athens and UWS — which have dumped hundreds of thousands of tons of waste creating huge, completely unpermitted, illegal landfills, making these companies millions.

I'm asking this Council - talk to your public works departments and come see what Athens and UWS have done, and make the cleanup of these sites a condition of their contract renewals.

Last year I brought State Assemblyman Juan Carillo and State Senator Valladares to these sites. What they saw led to them sponsoring AB 2310, an illegal dumping bill, which is now on Newsom's desk. CalRecycle came to tour these sites after I begged them to visit — and directly after they issued statewide emergency orders.

The LA Times, LAist, and Spectrum news have written multiple articles about these gigantic, self-igniting illegal dumps.

These dumps are a present and continuing threat. They self-combust creating fire after fire and have already burned two homes down.

I leave you with LA Fire Chief Marrone's report on illegal dumping and self-combusting mulch fires in the AV, Cal Recycle's emergency orders, and AB2310. Please come see how UWS and Athens illegally dumped LA City's waste and is putting an entire community in immediate danger.

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FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

"Proud Protectors of Life,
the Environment, and Property"

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May 28, 2024



TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: ANTHONY C. MARRONE, FIRE CHIEF

REPORT BACK ON THE BOARD MOTION – ENHANCING ENFORCEMENT AND RESPONSE TO **ILLEGAL DUMPING AND FIRES**

On May 7, 2024, your Honorable Board adopted a motion instructing the County of Los Angeles Fire Department (Department) to report back in 21 days in writing with the number of significant mulch/trash-related fires within the last four years that can be, in part, attributed to improper or illegal dumping of mulch and/or trash; the associated cost to the Department to provide these services; and in consultation with County Counsel, explore avenues available to recover costs associated with responding to these fires.

This report back addresses the ongoing issue of illegal mulch dumping and the resultant fire hazards in the County's rural areas, particularly in the Antelope Valley. The report provides a cost analysis, identifies gaps in enforcement mechanisms, and outlines the Department's challenges and costs associated with managing mulch pile fires based on data from 2020 to 2024.

Background

Illegal dumping of mulch/trash has significantly impacted communities across the County, particularly in rural areas like the Antelope Valley.

The Department faces persistent challenges with mulch pile fires. These fires are difficult to control and extinguish, often requiring extensive resources and prolonged efforts. The Bravo Incident which occurred on April 29, 2024, is a recent example.

SERVING THE UNINCORPORATED AREAS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND THE CITIES OF:

AGOURA HILLS
ARTESIA
AZUSA
BALDWIN PARK
BELL
BELL GARDENS
BELLFLOWER
BRADBURY
CALABASAS

CARSON
CERRITOS
CLAREMONT
COMMERCE
Covina
Cudahy
DIAZMONT
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LAWDALE
LOMITA
LYNWOOD
MALIBU
MAYWOOD
NORWALK
PALMDALE
PALOS VERDES ESTATES
PARAMOUNT

PICO RIVERA
POMONA
RANCHO PALOS VERDES
ROLLING HILLS
ROLLING HILLS ESTATES
ROSEMEAD
SAN DIMAS
SANTA CLARITA

SIGNAL HILL
SOUTH EL MONTE
SOUTH GATE
TEMPLE CITY
VERNON
WALNUT
WEST HOLLYWOOD
WESTLAKE VILLAGE
WHITTIER

costing over \$288,000 for four days of firefighting. These fires not only endanger emergency responders and the public but also strain the Department's resources, reducing the capacity to respond to other critical incidents.

Challenges and Costs

The Department has experienced significant challenges in managing mulch pile fires.

Significant Mulch/Trash-Related Fires (2020-2024):

- **Total Number of Incidents:** 42
- **Areas Impacted:** Predominantly Antelope Valley, with incidents in Neenach, Lancaster, and Fairmont.
- **Common Causes:** Spontaneous combustion, hot embers or ashes, and undetermined causes.
- **Acres Burned:** Ranged from 0.25 acres to 22 acres per incident.

Costs Associated with Response:

- **Direct Costs:** Personnel, equipment, and resources used in firefighting and containment efforts.
- **Indirect Costs:** Overhaul and monitoring, potential health hazards, and environmental impact mitigation.

Analysis of data from 2020 to 2024 shows multiple significant incidents totaling approximately \$1.6 million.

In consultation with County Counsel, we are exploring avenues to recover the costs associated with these responses. Potential recovery mechanisms include:

- Imposing fines on violators.
- Seeking reimbursement through civil litigation.
- Legislative changes to enable cost recovery from responsible parties.
- Special assessment and lien imposed for costs of enforcing abatement on parcels that pose a public nuisance.

Recommendations

To further mitigate the risk of wildland fires caused by the spontaneous combustion of large mulch piles and illegal dumping, we propose amendments to the County of Los Angeles Fire Code. Specifically, we recommend the inclusion of provisions to make it illegal to have large piles of mulch that exceed safe size limits and to prohibit illegal dumping of any materials that pose a fire hazard.

The proposed changes include:

- New sections in the Fire Code, Section 326.15 (Illegal Dumping).
- Developing and adopting a "Contaminated Mulch Ordinance" to completely disallow any construction and debris or any other non-organic material to be mixed with mulch and deposited on land.
- Expanding the existing Fire Code Section 326.15 (Illegal Dumping in Hazardous Wildland Fire Areas) to include new subsections.
- Section 326.15.1 (Mulch Permit) will require a permit for mulch piles outside fire hazard severity zones and greater than 12 inches in height, including fire prevention requirements and stipulations for fire suppression cost responsibilities.
- Section 326.15.2 (Unpermitted Mulch Fires) will hold property owners financially responsible for fire suppression costs if a fire occurs on a parcel without a mulch permit, with pile depths greater than 12 inches, and outside a Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

These amendments aim to reduce the incidence of spontaneous combustion in mulch piles and other dumped materials, thereby decreasing the number of related wildland fires and enhancing public safety.

Conclusion

The Department is addressing illegal mulch dumping, and the resultant fire hazards require coordinated efforts to strengthen regulatory enforcement, assess resource needs, and explore cost recovery options through direct fines, direct billing, and civil litigation of property owners. The Department remains committed to ensuring the safety of residents, communities, and emergency responders.

Each Supervisor
May 28, 2024
Page 4

If you have any questions, please contact me directly at (323) 881-6180, or your staff may contact Deputy Chief Albert Yanagisawa, Community Risk Reduction Bureau, at (213) 466-6609 or via email at Albert.Yanagisawa@fire.lacounty.gov.

ACM:ay

c: Fesia Davenport
Edward Yen
Each Fire Board Deputy