

# Metro up in the illegal dumps

## Recycling fees, demographics create rising tide of abandoned waste

Not everyone has a car. It makes it more challenging to get the material from your home to the local transfer station.

Metro Vancouver's rapid growth and push for highrise living is making it tougher for the region to curb illegal dumping, which is costing municipalities a total of \$2.5 million per year.



*TOWNSHIP OF LANGLEY ENGINEERING DIVISION* With more people living in multi-family buildings and often not owning vehicles, Metro Vancouver is experiencing a rise in abandoned waste such as sofas and mattresses in streets, alleys and dikes, says Paul Henderson, the region's manager of solid waste.

Paul Henderson, Metro's manager of solid waste, said higher recycling fees and a changing demographic — more people are living in multi-family buildings and do not own vehicles — is contributing to a rise in abandoned waste like mattresses and sofas in city streets, alleys and dikes.

At the same time, cities are seeing an increase in construction waste, including mixed loads of wood, metal, bricks and gypsum, which is likely linked to the redhot construction growth across the region.

“What we're seeing is, over time, the costs are increasing and a whole range of things are impacting it,” Henderson said, noting there are about 50,000 incidents of illegal dumping per year.

“Typically, leaving things at the curb and hoping people will pick them up is not a good thing.”

The situation prompted the City of Vancouver to approve an additional \$2.8 million to keep the city clean this year, potentially with the use of surveillance cameras at illegal dumping hot spots throughout the city.

Albert Shamus, the city's director of waste management, said Vancouver spends about \$1 million per year on illegal dumping, last year receiving 22,000 calls to the city's 311 line (a 30 per cent rise over 2014), with most related to abandoned garbage. About 70,000 illegally dumped items were collected.

Other municipalities report similar increases. The small corporation of Delta saw 328 abandoned items dumped on the dikes last year, up from 12 in 2013, Delta Mayor Lois Jackson said. So far this year, she said, there have been 189 incidents.

"It adds up," she said. "It's like graffiti. The longer you allow it to sit there, more people will dump on top of it."

**Surrey**, meanwhile saw a huge jump in illegal dumping, with 9,049 cases in 2013 increasing to 12,204 last year, but expects to halve that number in 2016 by employing mobile surveillance cameras in hot spots — mostly in the northwest quadrant — to catch offenders.

Rob Costanzo, Surrey's manager of engineering, said while the dumping is widespread across the city, much of it happens on Colebrook Road or around areas with secondary suites or higher density.

Costanzo said his city has already taken measures to reduce the cost of illegal dumping and is on track to see a drop in costs from \$930,000 last year to about \$535,000 this year.

The city has a program in place where residents in single-family detached homes can legally leave four large items per year at the curb for pickup, he said, but noted many are not aware of it. The city will aim to raise awareness of the program, which he said will also be rolled out in a pilot project to include multi-family homes.

Meanwhile, Metro Vancouver plans to issue a report next month on how to deal specifically with mattresses, which were banned from the local dump in 2011 and as a result cost \$15 to recycle.

Henderson noted Metro has been lobbying the province to include mattresses in a stewardship program — where those who manufacture and sell mattresses also pay to have them recycled — but the issue isn't expected to be addressed until next year. The move would make it free for mattresses to be recycled.

Shamus said having the recycling fees waived could help discourage the illegal dumping. The situation is likely to worsen as the region continues to grow, he said, and it's crucial Metro municipalities work together to tackle the issue.

Most of the mattresses dumped in Vancouver are around multifamily homes, likely because those tenants don't have vehicles to haul them away.

"Not everyone has a car. It makes it more challenging to get the material from your home to the local transfer station," he said. "It's not just us. We're going to have more success if we look at from the region's (perspective)."

Henderson agreed that stiffer recycling and tipping fees are having an impact on dumping across the region, although he noted gypsum is still being dumped regularly across the region and there are concerns it could contain asbestos.

Meanwhile, the regional district will look at waiving tipping fees for volunteer community cleanup events, and charging a surcharge to haulers who appear at transfer stations with unsecured loads.

A staff report suggests charging a 50 per cent surcharge, to a maximum of \$50, to haulers with unsecured loads in an attempt to reduce incidents of "escaped" trash hitting the streets during travel.