



Investigation of the impact of  
bulky waste services on illegal dumping

**Summary Report**

October 2018

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Methodology .....	3
3	Key findings.....	4
4	Detailed findings .....	4
4.1	Bulky waste services.....	4
4.2	Levels of bulky waste dumping .....	5
4.3	Responses to dumping of bulky waste.....	5
4.4	Impact of bulky waste services on dumping .....	5
4.5	Reporting of bulky waste dumping .....	5
5	Recommendations.....	6
5.1	Promotion and education.....	6
5.2	Type and features of kerbside services .....	6
5.3	Design of non-kerbside services.....	6
5.4	Response to inappropriate use, and dumping .....	6



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## 1 Introduction

Combating illegal dumping is a key priority for the NSW Government and local communities. The government is committed to protecting local environments from pollution by reducing all types of illegal dumping incidents across the state by 30% by 2020.<sup>1</sup> The dumping of bulky waste, along with other types of illegal dumping, is a significant waste management issue for local councils, and for the state of NSW, consuming significant resources and adversely affecting public health and amenity. One in 10 local councils spend more than \$500,000 each year on cleaning up and managing waste illegally dumped on kerbsides, bushland, and other public land<sup>2</sup>.

This research explored the link between bulky waste services provided by local councils in NSW, and the incidence and nature of illegal dumping of bulky waste at the kerbside. Bulky waste services differ widely in terms of the type of service offered, the materials collected, the quantities permitted, and the ways in which the service is promoted or advertised. The aim of the research was to identify opportunities to reduce illegal dumping through the way in which bulky waste services are designed and delivered.

## 2 Methodology

In this project, a bulky waste service was considered as collection from the kerbside of bulky non-putrescible items which would not normally fit into a kerbside bin. Bulky waste includes items such as furniture, household goods and appliances, metal items, whitegoods, e-waste, mattresses, carpet, wood, timber, garden vegetation, tyres, and car parts.

Councils were classified as Metro Inner (there were 15 in this classification), Metro Fringe (19), Regional City (30), Regional Shire (52), or Remote Shire (15). This simplified presentation of results enabled regional differences to be observed.

Information on the characteristics of the bulky waste services provided by each council, and the council's attitude, approach, and allocation of resources to managing illegal dumping was obtained through a review of council websites, and telephone interviews. Of 128 NSW local councils, 125 participated in the interviews, indicating a high level of interest in the project, bulky waste services, and illegal dumping.

Data on the quantities of materials collected in 2016-17 by councils via kerbside bulky waste services was obtained from the annual Local Government Waste and Resource Recovery Survey, and in a few cases adjusted using information from the telephone survey. The collection rate in kilograms per LGA household, and recycling as a percentage of the total quantity collected, were calculated.

Data for illegal dumping was obtained from both the RIDonline database – from 1 July 2014 to mid-March 2018, and from the Local Government Waste and Resource Recovery Surveys for 2015-16 and 2016-17, and used to estimate the average number of instances of dumping of bulky waste per 1,000 households in each council. Where RIDonline data was not available the gaps were filled using the Waste and Resource Recovery Survey data. The results were compared within regional groups to assign a level of bulky waste dumping: very low, low, average, high or very high. Trends were investigated but there were only 31 councils where a trend could be determined. Analysis therefore focused on the level of dumping.

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<sup>1</sup> NSW EPA, NSW Illegal Dumping Strategy 2017–21, February 2018

<sup>2</sup> NSW EPA, Kerbside Dumping Qualitative Research Summary Report, March 2017

## 3 Key findings

### **The design of the collection service matters more than the type of service**

The research does not demonstrate a clear link between the type of bulky waste service offered (scheduled, pre-booked or both) and the amount of illegal dumping experienced.

### **Lower size limits are associated with higher levels of dumping**

Pick-up volume limit does appear to be an influencing factor. Across all regions, a lower size limit appears to increase the level of bulky waste dumping, and a size limit of 3 m<sup>3</sup> or above appears to significantly reduce the level of dumping.

### **Communicating about illegal dumping should be active and early**

Three quarters of councils consider that dumping of bulky waste on the kerbside is illegal, however, only half of these tell householders that it is.

Most councils with Very Low levels of illegal dumping actively inform householders before they use the bulky waste service that dumping material on the kerb is illegal.

### **Active promotion of non-kerbside bulky waste services reduces bulky waste dumping**

Using active means of promoting non-kerbside bulky waste services offered appears to contribute to a much lower level of bulky waste dumping in areas where there are no kerbside bulky waste services.

### **Informing and enforcing appropriate use of kerbside services appears to reduce dumping**

Across councils in all areas where the response to inappropriate use of a kerbside service is to collect the material, or return and enforce a request that the householder remove the material from the kerbside, the level of bulky waste dumping appears significantly lower.

### **Councils typically offer more collections than residents use**

Across all regions, the average use of collection services was lower than what was available, indicating that households do not need as many services as on offer.

## 4 Detailed findings

### 4.1 Bulky waste services

60% of NSW councils provide some type of bulky waste service at the kerbside. All metropolitan councils provide a kerbside service, as do 60% of Regional Cities, 43% of Regional Shires and a quarter of Remote Shires. A pre-booked service is most common in Metropolitan and Regional Cities while scheduled services are favoured by Regional and Remote Shires.

Of the 40% of councils that do not currently provide a kerbside service, half had provided one in the past. The main reasons mentioned for ceasing, or not providing, a kerbside service included amenity, cost, lack of resources, and health and safety. Services provided instead of a kerbside service are mainly free drop-off of some items, second-hand shops, free drop-off at landfill, or free drop-off vouchers or days.

The number of kerbside pick-ups available in metropolitan councils vary widely, ranging from 1 to 26 pre-booked pick-ups per year. Regional and remote councils provide either one or two pick-ups per year. Across all regions, the average use of services was lower than what was available, indicating that households do not need as many pick-ups as on offer. This discrepancy between availability and actual use is most evident in metropolitan councils offering pre-booked collections where the average use is just 0.7 pick-ups of the average 8.3 available per year.

In metropolitan councils, pre-booked services at \$61 per pick-up were cheaper than scheduled at \$79 per pick-up. The reverse is true in regional and remote councils where pre-booked services cost \$54 per pick-up compared to \$41 per pick-up for scheduled services.

In all regions scheduled services have a much higher recycling rate than pre-booked services.

#### 4.2 Levels of bulky waste dumping

Overall dumping of bulky waste is low but increasing slightly. Half of councils where there is data have low or very low levels of dumping, but a third have high or very high levels. Bulky waste – usually furniture, clothes or carpet – is the most common type of waste reported as illegally dumped in metropolitan councils and regional cities. In regional and remote shires, kerbside services appear to limit the dumping of bulky waste where they are provided.

#### 4.3 Responses to dumping of bulky waste

Most councils consider dumping of bulky waste on the kerbside to be illegal, but few tell householders that it is, and of those that do tell them only a few tell them before they do it.

Following an incident of illegal dumping, 21% of councils will simply collect the dumped waste without investigation. Of those who do investigate and where the dumper can be identified half of all councils will ask the householder to remove the dumped waste. 11% of councils will use tape to indicate the dumping is under investigation.

83% of councils encourage residents to report illegal dumping, most commonly by their website, signs or posters (both RID and council branded types), and newspaper ads.

#### 4.4 Impact of bulky waste services on dumping

It does not appear that the type of bulky waste service offered (scheduled, pre-booked or both) has an impact on the amount of illegal dumping of bulky waste. However, other factors do appear to reduce dumping including:

- A higher service size limit (> 3m<sup>3</sup>)
- Offering at least two collections per year
- Informing and enforcing appropriate use of kerbside services
- Actively informing householders dumping of bulky waste on the kerbside is illegal
- Asking residents to remove bulky waste illegally dumped on the kerbside

Where kerbside services are not provided, there is evidence that dumping is reduced by:

- Providing free drop-off days rather than free drop-off vouchers or free drop-off of just some items
- Active promotion of non-kerbside bulky waste services.

#### 4.5 Reporting of bulky waste dumping

There is a difference between the actual incidence of illegal dumping, and the reporting of it. The way councils respond to bulky waste on the kerbside can also affect reporting of it. For example, for booked or scheduled collections, removing it quickly reduces the likelihood that it is reported as illegally dumped. To ensure the most **accurate reporting**, action that councils could take are:

- Minimise the time the waste is left on the kerb – particularly if it is in a highly visible location (this stops booked or scheduled collections being reported and existing piles being added to);

- Seek to convey a sense of ownership of the waste, for example by taping, stickering or otherwise marking the waste to indicate that someone is responsible for it; and
- Actively educate and inform people about the way in which illegal dumping is managed, and, where appropriate, engaging them, in participating in that management.

The way councils define bulky waste dumping – for example, some councils provide a grace period before and after the scheduled collection date within which they do not consider the waste as illegally dumped, others do not – can also contribute to inconsistent reporting and analysis. Adoption of a standard definition of illegal dumping of bulky waste should be considered.

## 5 Recommendations

It is recommended that bulky waste services comprise the following elements to minimise dumping of bulky waste.

### 5.1 Promotion and education

The following activities are recommended prior to householders using the services:

- ⊙ Include clear information about the appropriate use of the services;
- ⊙ Actively inform householders that dumping bulky waste on the kerb is illegal, with clear information about what constitutes illegal dumping, and the consequences of doing so;
- ⊙ Encourage residents to report illegal dumping but not too much; and
- ⊙ Actively educate and inform people about the way in which illegal dumping is managed, and where appropriate engage them to participate in that management.

### 5.2 Type and features of kerbside services

The following elements are recommended in the design of kerbside services:

- ⊙ Applying a size limit of 3 m<sup>3</sup> or more significantly reduces the level of bulky waste dumping;
- ⊙ Offering at least two collections per year, particularly in regional and remote areas, appears to reduce the level of bulky waste dumping, but offering more than that is not necessary, and where more are offered, they are rarely used to their full extent.

### 5.3 Design of non-kerbside services

The following elements are recommended in the design of non-kerbside services:

- ⊙ Free drop-off days appear to be more effective in minimising bulky waste dumping than free drop-off vouchers or just free acceptance of some items at waste facilities; and
- ⊙ Where free drop-off vouchers are used, providing two or more appears most likely to limit bulky waste dumping.

### 5.4 Response to inappropriate use, and dumping

- ⊙ When services are used inappropriately:
  - ask householders to remove it from the kerbside and specify the timeframe in which they should do so;
  - provide clear information to the householder about why the waste has not been collected and what alternatives are available;
  - remind them of the consequences of not removing the waste in a timely fashion;
  - return and check it has been removed; and
  - enforce the request if necessary.

- ⊙ When the householder is asked to book a pick-up for waste placed on the kerb at the wrong time ask them to remove the waste and only place it out just before the scheduled time. Otherwise it may be reported as dumped waste. Also ensure the waste is collected by the service as quickly as possible.
- ⊙ When a householder has dumped bulky waste:
  - ask them to remove the waste;
  - return and check they have done so; and
  - enforce the request if necessary.

Recording the location and nature of the waste (with photos, videos, or GPS records) can make the enforcement process easier. Where this information must be transferred from the bulky waste collection team to the enforcement team, timely handover is essential to reduce the time that waste is left on the kerb.

Making any enforcement action taken public knowledge can also be effective.

- ⊙ If your aim is to reduce the number of illegal dumping incidents reported by the public in associated with a booked or scheduled service, then where the waste is in a visible position, or cannot be linked to an owner, collect the waste as soon as possible to reduce the likelihood of it as being reported as dumped. Only leave the waste if it is not likely to be reported.
- ⊙ When waste is stickered or taped and left behind, ensure people in the area are aware of what action is being taken, and what they should do.
- ⊙ If your aim is to reduce the number of public reports to Council about illegal dumping, then do not wait for a complaint before enforcing removal action for inappropriate use of a kerbside service. This applies if such a complaint will be considered illegal dumping.