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One man's trash is another man's environmental concern

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By: Russell Wilde

The way Caldwell County Environmental Control Officer Mike Bittner puts it, his job is simple but important.

"Basically just try to keep the county clean," he said.

Since October, he's done a lot of just that.

"A little over 33,000 pounds of trash, about 500 tires so far," he said.



Caldwell County Environmental Control Officer Mike Bittner.

He's also picked up several gallons of paint and motor oil, products that can cause serious problems if improperly disposed of.

"There's a lot of it that I find in the watershed or the creek beds and eventually that's going to get in our drinking water," Bittner said. "Once that happens that's not good for nobody."

Dumping



Illegal dumping is not to be taken lightly, for more information about [penalties and fines](#), click the link.

Money to fund this program came from a grant, and commissioners say the program seems to be working.

"I think it is really making our county look a lot better," Neto Madrigal said.

Bittner said dead end county roads are popular places to dump. He said he documents each site, takes pictures, looks for evidence, and then cleans it up.

The county said having someone assigned to the problem full time has cut down on the piles of waste.

"We're able to clean up a lot of the county roads," Madrigal said.



While high fees may be why some chose to dump, Bittner said there are people willing to pay for a lot of the waste he finds.

"There are places to take this stuff, and you can take your refrigerator, stove, etc to scrap yards and get paid for it," he said. "You don't need to be throwing it on the side of the road."

Caldwell County does not consider this trash pick program a service. Every effort is made to identify the dumper and criminally prosecute.

Fines can range from \$50 to \$25,000 depending on how much is dumped. Several cases are pending with the District Attorney's office.



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