

# An Unsightly Situation

## The Problem of Illegal Dumping on Crown Land

By Tom Mason



Art Swaine holds a discarded security camera found at an illegal dumpsite near Shag Harbour.

The abandoned rail line that skirts the community of Shag Harbour is narrow and overgrown, nearly impassable in spots as DNR senior technician Art Swaine maneuvers his large four-wheel drive pickup through it. The rail line serves as more than just a recreational trail for ATVs and hikers; along its route are a number of illegal dumpsites.

Swaine stops his truck at one of them. Old computers and electronics, appliances, fishing gear, bundles of film negatives, even a doghouse with the dog's name still written on it, are heaped in a large pile of garbage. In a couple of hundred years it could be an archeologist's dream, but is it how we want to be remembered? Right now it's unsightly, unsafe and expensive to clean up.

"We can trace some of the garbage back to the original owners, but unless we catch them in the act of actually dumping, it's very hard to prosecute them," says Swaine. "If we find their name in a book or something, they just say they sold it at a yard sale or put it out with their trash and somebody took it."

Illegal dumping on Crown land has been a huge problem for many years, made even more frustrating by the fact that the motives of the crime are hard to explain. Most of the garbage found in the dumpsites could easily be put at the side of the curb on special cleanup days, recycled or even composted. At one of the sites on Swaine's inspection route, we find garbage bags full of leaves; another contains cardboard boxes full of rotting food.

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**Clarification:** The article, *Late Maturing Grass - A 'New Field' of Wildlife Research* (Winter/Spring 2004), should have mentioned the fact that the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is also a partner in this important research project.

“That’s the strange thing,” says Swaine. “In most cases it would actually be easier for them to dispose of their garbage the proper way, rather than haul it way out here. Most of these illegal dumpers do it out of habit, because that’s the way it’s always been done.”

The problem isn’t confined to Shelburne County where Swaine is based. Illegal dumping on Crown land is prevalent in many parts of Nova Scotia, particularly in isolated areas that are close to towns and villages.

“It’s definitely worse in Shelburne than in some parts of the province,” says DNR area supervisor Gordon Wilson. “It has a lot to do with the proximity of Crown land to population areas. I would say Shelburne is on the verge of being a major problem.”

In many cases dumpsites contain chemicals and materials that are hazardous to the environment and to

wildlife. Some things, like live ammunition, can be dangerous for the people cleaning them out as well. But most of the sites are simply unsightly and costly to clean up. Wilson estimates that it could cost \$100,000 or more to clean up sites in his jurisdiction. “We cleaned up three sites recently. They were all sites that we could restrict access to after we had cleaned them up. It cost us about \$5,000 to do it and I think it was money well spent.”

Wilson says that education is the only way to break people of the habit of illegal dumping. “There comes a point when you have to prosecute, but education is really the key. We need to teach people that this is not an acceptable way to deal with garbage. After all, this problem is really going to impact on our children’s generation the most.”

*Tom Mason is a freelance writer who lives on Nova Scotia’s South Shore.*

## Here’s How You Can Help

- Many municipalities have brochures or telephone hotlines to advise on the best ways to dispose of unwanted items. Check the telephone book blue pages or contact your councilor.
- Don’t contribute to illegal dumping unwittingly. Make sure the contractors, tradespeople and garbage collectors you deal with dispose of the materials from your home in the proper manner.
- Report incidents of dumping on Crown land to your local DNR office or the police.
- Talk to your friends, neighbours and young people and let them know you think illegal dumping is unacceptable.
- To see how well Nova Scotia is dealing with waste, visit the Resource Recovery Fund Board (RRFB) at [www.rrfb.com](http://www.rrfb.com). Learn the right way to dispose of, or recycle, things. There’s even a “materials exchange” to help turn one person’s trash into another person’s treasure.



Bottom left: renovation waste and vehicle parts in illegal dump site. Bottom right: Illegal dumpsite on Crown land near Antrim.