



**Snohomish County
County Executive's Office**

For immediate release – Wednesday, June 28, 2006

Aaron Reardon

County Executive

M/S #407

3000 Rockefeller Avenue

Everett, WA 98201

(425) 388-3460

FAX (425) 388-3434

county.executive@co.snohomish.wa.us

www.co.snohomish.wa.us

NEWS ADVISORY

Contact: Brian Parry, 425.388.3050; cell: 425.210.0446

Executive Reardon announces new tool to fight illegal junkyards

“Illegal and dangerous dump sites will no longer be tolerated
in Snohomish County,” says Reardon

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today announced the first result of the County's new code enforcement and abatement policy. He hailed the policy as a valuable weapon in the effort to make Snohomish County a place **“we are all proud to call home.”**

This week, Snohomish County initiated its first ever abatement to clean a long-standing eyesore and threat to public health in Snohomish County. The property, located outside of Monroe, was littered with more than 30 automobiles filled with garbage and solid waste.

Previously, County Code Enforcement and Prosecuting Attorneys would pursue fines against those responsible for illegal junkyards, but did not have the policies, procedures or resources to actually clean the sites and assess the property owners for the cost.

“For the first time, we have used this powerful tool to fight back against this County's worst code offenders,” said Executive Reardon.

This morning, Executive Reardon inspected the Monroe site as a cleaning crew contracted by the County took on the grueling work of clearing trash and loading wrecked vehicles onto a waiting 40-foot trailer. Enthusiastic neighbors smiled and waved as they drove by an abandoned travel trailer which was crushed and hauled away that same day.

According to County Code Enforcement staff, complaints on the Monroe property began as early as 1997. However, complaints against property owners for major code violations have

been piling up for decades. Until now, the County did not have a process in place to abate illegal junkyards.

In support of his policies and vision for healthy, sustainable communities, Executive Reardon proposed and the County Council approved in the 2006 budget, \$125,000 for an abatement fund and pilot project. The project was officially rolled-out this week and will continue to move forward as a series of clean-ups throughout the County.

During the next six months, additional programs will be added to form a broader Clean and Safe initiative that will continue to make improvements in the safety, health and quality of life of Snohomish County residents.

Reardon applauded the hard work of all involved in developing abatement program. **“I am extremely pleased with the hard work and dedication of our Code Enforcement division,”** said Reardon. He went on to say, **“This would not have been possible without the partnership of the County Council, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and the Sheriff’s Office.”**

Abatement Program Background

- Abatement is the removal of junk, hazardous materials, vehicles and other trash along with the clean-up of a property that has become an illegal junkyard. The cost of the clean-up is then assessed to the property owner. These junkyards pose a public health and safety risk, have the potential to increase local crime, decrease neighboring property values, are a public nuisance and have an overall negative impact our quality of life.
- For the past six months Code Enforcement officers have been working with the prosecuting attorney’s office to establish the legal authority and process for abating properties. In addition, the officers received certification from the state that will allow them to certify vehicles as “junk” through the junk title affidavit process. This certification allows the officers to dispose of the vehicles in a more efficient manner.
- The cost of the current abatement is estimated at \$17,000. The cost of the abatement will be assessed against the property as a special assessment. If the assessment is not paid within three years, the county may foreclose on the property to recover those costs.
- Snohomish County is only pursuing abatement on those sites that have gone through the entire Code Enforcement process and have a judgment from the Court authorizing the County to abate.

When the County Code Enforcement division receives a complaint the first approach is to resolve the issues through voluntary compliance. If that fails, code enforcement pursues a court order from superior court to require abatement by the violator. After failure to comply with the court order, the county may pursue a warrant of abatement which allows the county to abate the site and charge the costs to the property owner.