

Media Advisory – Oct. 1, 2008

Contact: Christopher Schwarzen

Office: 425-388-3883

Email: Christopher.Schwarzen@snoco.org

County tightens codes against illegal junkyards

Reardon applauds County Council for supporting tougher regulations

Illegal junkyard operators beware. Snohomish County's code enforcement regulations just got tougher.

On Wednesday, the county council approved recommendations for strengthening ordinances against code enforcement violators.

Under the changes, county code enforcement crews now will be able to:

- issue citations for less severe violations;
- use a streamlined warning process to facilitate rapid voluntary compliance;
- use a new schedule of monetary penalties of up to \$75,000 per violation;
- record a Certificate of Noncompliance against a property in violation – invaluable information to prospective property owners and lenders.

These new provisions were developed through stakeholder groups and supported by County Executive Aaron Reardon, who has increased awareness of code enforcement issues in Snohomish County since taking office in 2004. They will allow code enforcement crews to be even more efficient in ridding county neighborhoods of violators.

“Illegal junkyards and code-enforcement violations will not be tolerated,” Reardon said. “They create environmental hazards, are a neighborhood eyesore and become a breeding ground for crime. I want to thank the County Council for standing with us in this effort to stamp out crime.”

In 2006, Reardon proposed a junkyard abatement pilot project, which assesses the cost of property cleanup against the property owner. Since then, the county's code enforcement division has completed abatements on six sites, removing more than 300 junk vehicles, 100 tons of debris and more than 300 used tires from the sites.

Twelve other owners have voluntarily cleaned up junkyard conditions on their property in response to the tougher stance.

In addition, the county hosted a neighborhood cleanup in May near Mariner High School, resulting in the removal of 108 computers, 308 tires, 5.5 tons of metal, a dozen refrigerators and 330 gallons of paint and oil from area homes. The county also hosts an annual graffiti paint out, another code enforcement violation.

“As we move forward with this new code, we’ll be able to better promote sustainable and livable communities within Snohomish County,” said Snohomish County Fire Marshal Tom Maloney, who oversees the code enforcement division. “In addition, these initiatives will enable us to continue providing outreach and education to our citizens on complying with county code.”

Snohomish County only pursues abatement on sites that have gone through the entire Code Enforcement process and have a judgment from the courts authorizing the county to abate.

When the County Code Enforcement Division receives a complaint, the first approach is to resolve the issue 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 clean up the site and charge the costs to the property owner.

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