

# What a dump!

## Desert trash leads to mounting frustration

By **CHRISTINA CALLOWAY**  
TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Ripped mattresses, charred refrigerators and tattered clothes have replaced the beautiful imagery Lake Havasu City's surrounding desert once embodied for resident Rodger Melton.

He didn't expect the desert area turn into a literal wasteland but that's what it's become. Despite the clean-ups Melton and other volunteers conduct, it seems illegal dumping in the desert is only getting worse.

"People don't go too far to dump their trash," Melton said. "Apparently it's a sport to shoot up your microwave or couch. You wouldn't believe what you'll find out there."

Melton, an avid off-roader, said he travels the desert at least twice a week. He relocated here from Washington about five years ago because of the amount of desert activity and the vast land to explore.



Christina Calloway/News-Herald photo

**Rodger Melton shows the kinds of trash that gets dumped in the desert near Paso De Oro Drive in Lake Havasu City. Melton said he's found anything from shot up televisions to couches.**

He joined the Havasu 4-Wheelers Club to socialize with fellow riders and to give back to the roads he loves to travel. The club's members do a number of good deeds around the desert, from picking up trash to fencing off mines.

During their larger clean-ups, Melton said the club is able to fill two 40-yard Dumpsters in one half-day and the garbage only represents a tiny portion of what is out there. Their efforts simply aren't enough to upkeep the state lands.

Melton said he and many others are upset with the lack of prosecution for violators and want more done to hold dumpers responsible.

Enforcement has depended heavily on Mohave

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County's three-person Environmental Rural Area Cleanup Enforcement (ERACE) unit, but the agency rarely takes action against offenders as few illegal dumping cases end in conviction.

In 2014, the unit investigated 388 cases of illegal dumping, many of which were initiated by resident calls. The unit was responsible for cleaning up more than 165 tons of waste with community partners.

They have already investigated 321 cases this year, based on the unit's October report. Coordinator Todd Davidson did not return a request for comment

before press deadline.

Mohave County District 3 Supervisor Buster Johnson said he's pushed for harsher punishment for offenders through legislation earlier this year but the Board of Supervisors failed to back it.

"(ERACE) is not what I wanted," Johnson said. "We haven't arrested one person. What difference does it make if we catch you? There's no punishment. They're continuing to do it."

Johnson wanted to offer a \$500 reward for people who provide information that leads to the successful prosecution of an illegal

waste dumper.

"Until the board decides to put an end to it, I don't think the board is taking it seriously," Johnson said. "This (illegal dumping) ordinance has been in place for a long time and it's not working. It's not stopping the dumping. We're just doing free clean-ups."

The fear of Melton and others is if the problem continues to worsen, the offenders will ruin the desert for everyone by pushing the Bureau of Land Management to close the land.

"It gives us a bad name," said Ed Goodwin, who

was out shooting at targets Wednesday in the desert area near Paso De Oro Drive. "We just get frustrated with the trash. We want to keep it clean. We're responsible. We don't want them to close the desert but we can understand why they want to."

Melton said he hopes the pictures of trash will at least shame violators into using the landfill and legal methods of dumping.

"The law enforcement is the hard part but there should be real fines and real prosecution," Melton said. "There needs to be more public awareness."