



Operation DBAD

DON'T BE A DUMPER

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Acknowledgement of country

The Northern Territory Government respectfully acknowledges the First Nations people of this country and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to their leaders past, present and emerging.

Context

Illegal dumping is a significant problem across the whole of the Northern Territory and particularly in the Alice Springs region. Incidents of illegal dumping are regularly reported to the Alice Springs Town Council, Parks and Wildlife (Department of Tourism and Hospitality), the Environment Division of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment (DLPE) and the NT EPA Pollution Response Line.

Solving the illegal dumping problem in the Alice Springs municipality is important for many reasons:

Illegal dumping harms the environment. Poor management of waste, particularly hazardous wastes (e.g. batteries, paint, asbestos and tyres), can adversely impact air quality and ecosystems, including surface and groundwater systems.

Illegal dumping makes land unattractive and reduces its value. No one wants to live in areas that are untidy or polluted. Further, dumping begets dumping, which often means the areas get worse and worse if dumping is not remediated.

How big is the problem?

Understanding the full nature and extent of the waste crime and illegal dumping “problem” is challenging. This is because the whole point of illegal dumping is to ensure it goes undetected – dumpers want to make sure their crime is out of sight and out of mind.

Initial intelligence gathering and analysis undertaken by the Environment Regulation Division in DLPE suggests that:

1. since 2018, occurrences of illegal dumping has increased year-on-year (Figure 1)
2. illegally dumped waste primarily comprises domestic wastes (Figure 2)
3. waste dumping primarily occurs on vacant Crown land (Figure 3), meaning clean up becomes a problem for the Territory taxpayer.

Waste count per year

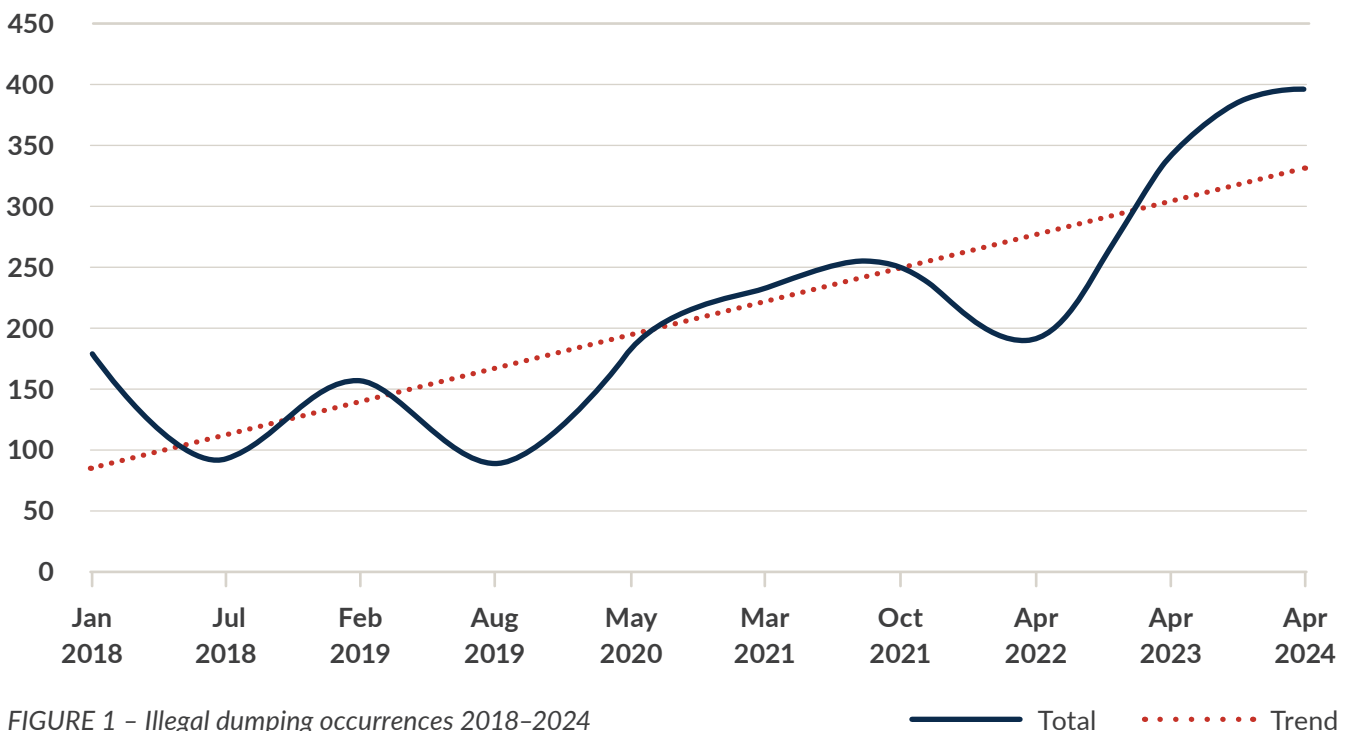


FIGURE 1 – Illegal dumping occurrences 2018–2024

Waste categories 2011-2024

Unknown wastes not included.

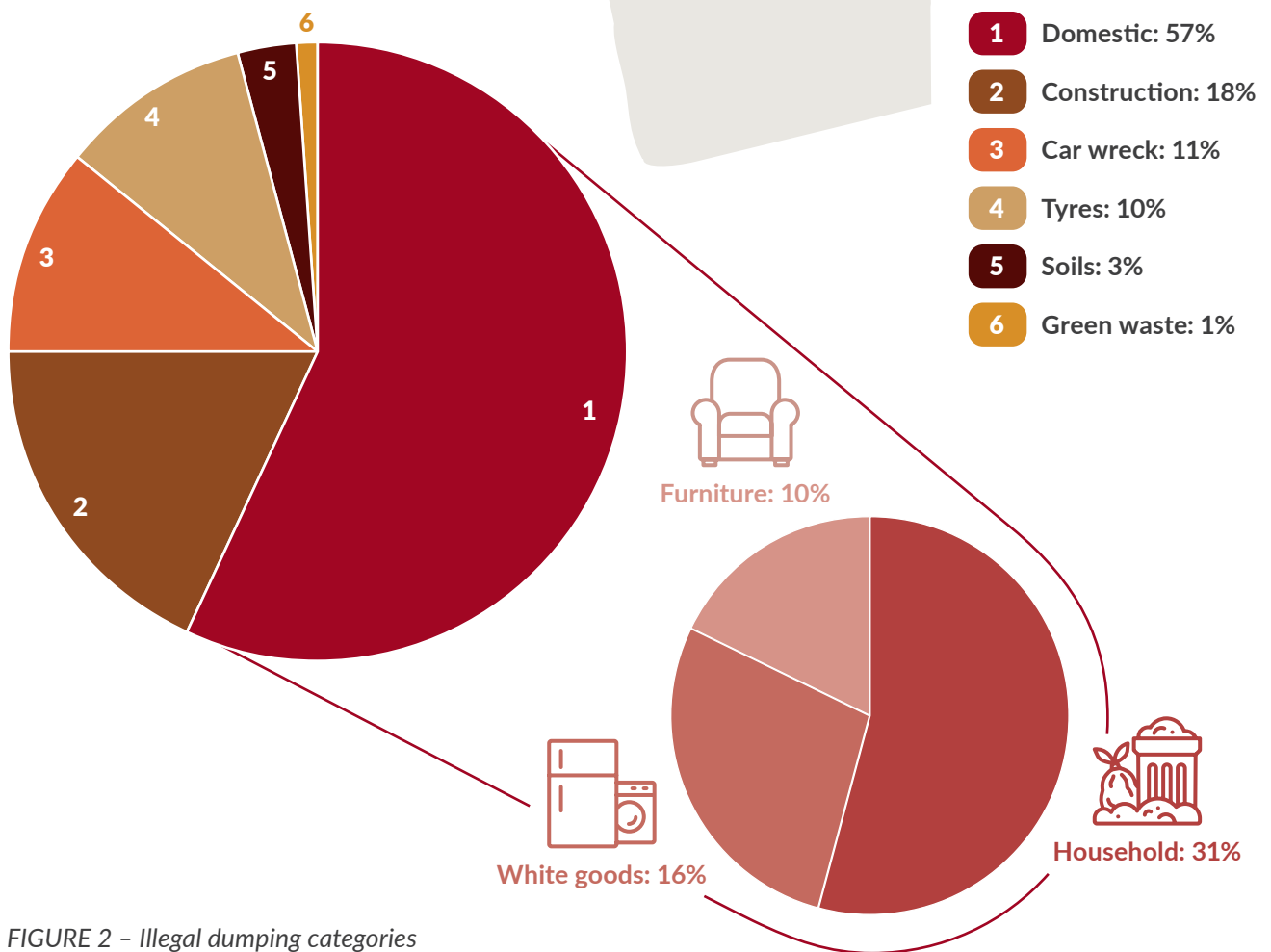


FIGURE 2 - Illegal dumping categories



What's causing the problem?

Understanding what's driving illegal dumping will inform our strategies to stop it. There can be many causes of illegal dumping. Research undertaken by regulators in other Australian jurisdictions suggest that the primary causes for illegal dumping include:

1. Costs of disposal

Landfills often impose fees for the disposal of wastes at a landfill. Some types of wastes (e.g., tyres, asbestos containing materials, refrigerators or mattresses) have additional disposal fees attached to them due to the need for processing or specialised handling and disposal. In today's economic climate with cost-of-living pressures, increased waste disposal fees (perceived or actual) may be an incentive to avoid landfills and dispose of waste illegally. Initial survey work undertaken by the Environment Regulation Division indicates that approximately 68% of the waste illegally dumped in the Alice Springs region is likely to have disposal fees attached to it.

2. There is no economic value on the waste being dumped

Research suggests that if a resource has an economic value, then it's less likely to be considered a "waste" and end up in landfill or even worse – the environment. Low quality, low value items (e.g. cheap poorly made furniture, soiled mattresses) that are unable to be sold on or repurposed are more likely to be dumped than high value recyclable items. The Territory's container deposit scheme is a good example of putting value on what had previously been considered a low value "waste" to keep it out of the environment. Unfortunately, most of the waste we're seeing dumped in the Alice Springs region currently has a very limited or no commercial value.

3. Awareness and education

Alice Springs has a very transient population, with some estimates suggesting a 40% resident retention rate over 5 years. Those that are vacating residential properties may not be aware of the available waste disposal services, particularly people from non-English speaking backgrounds. For example, the Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC) provides a weekly municipal waste collection service and permits an additional 2M³ of domestic waste to be disposed of, for free, at the local landfill each year. The ASTC also runs a campaign at the local landfill to allow selected white goods to be disposed of (on selected days) free of charge. Additionally, ASTC has provided a 10c refund for wine and spirit bottles for over 10 years.

4. Low risks of being caught and low consequences

Illegal dumping is mainly occurring in areas where there is little to no risk of getting caught. If there are no consequences for illegal dumping (i.e. fines, penalties or accountability, including "naming and shaming") then it will be cheaper to dump.

5. Community pride and stewardship

Areas that are perceived as being less valuable by the community are far more likely to be targeted by illegal dumpers than those that are considered valuable. This problem is often compounded by the prolonged presence of waste at a site. Evidence shows that dumping begets dumping.

6. Distance to lawful landfill

Distance is often cited as a major reason for illegal dumping across Australia. Analysis indicates that the vast majority of Alice Springs is within a 15-minute drive of the local landfill, so we don't believe this is a major cause of illegal dumping the region.

It is not clear which of these factors is driving the waste crime problem in the Alice Springs region. It is likely a combination of the above factors. This means we need to take a multifaceted approach involving many stakeholders to combat the problem.

OUR GOAL:

Operation DBAD aims to understand the nature and scale of the illegal dumping problem and actively reverse the upward trend of illegal dumping in Alice Springs that we have observed in recent years.

Survey areas and hotspots 2011-2024

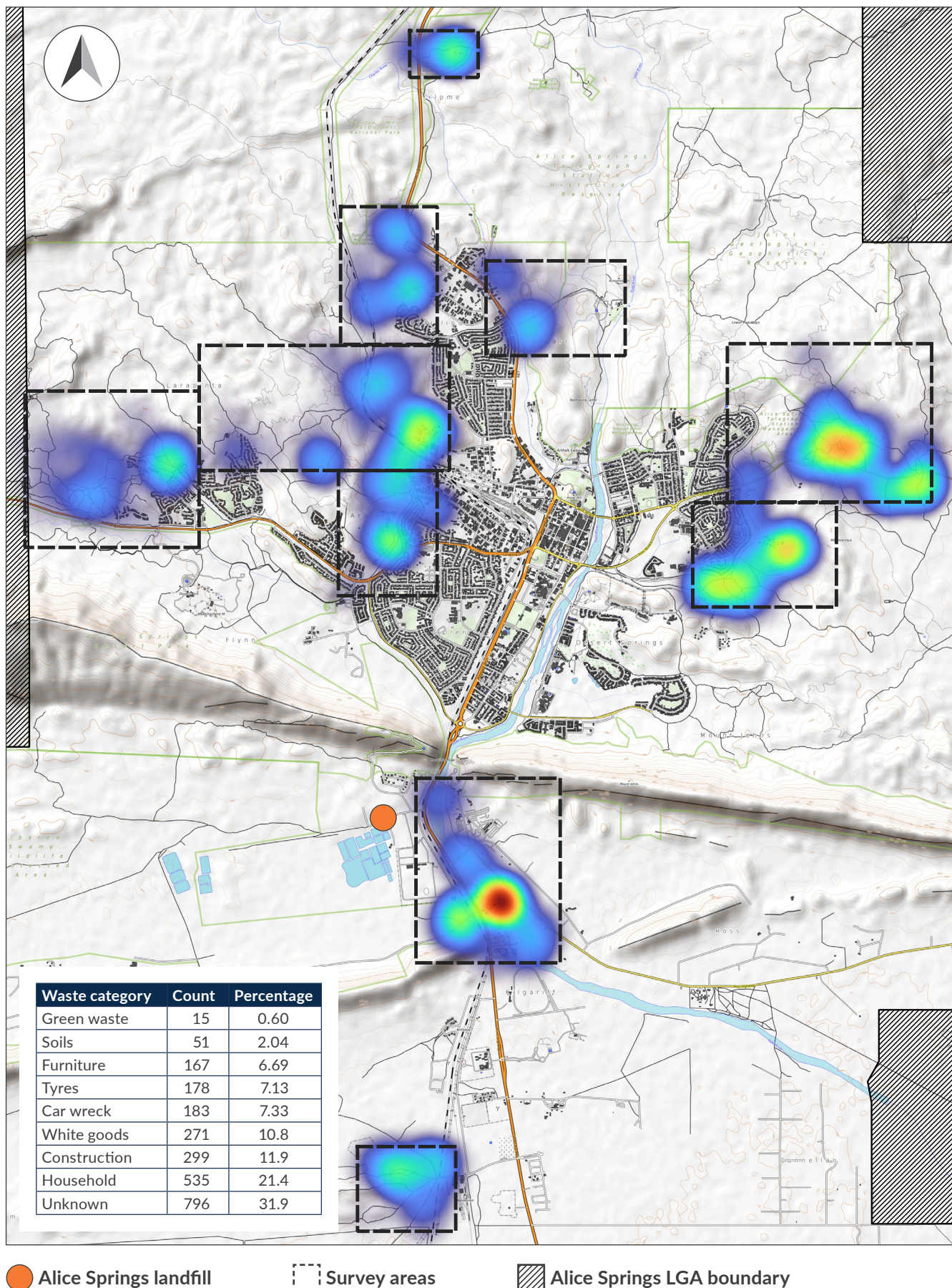


FIGURE 3 - Illegal dumping heat-map

Our strategy

Our strategy is data-based, flexible and iterative, capable of pivoting as intelligence related to illegal dumping is improved.

Our strategy includes 6 key outputs:

OUTPUT

1

Project governance

We will establish strong governance with the right stakeholders to ensure success.



OUTPUT

2

Understand the nature and scale of the problem

We will identify where illegal dumping is occurring and what wastes are being dumped.



OUTPUT

3

Identify the cause

We will understand what's causing the problem.



OUTPUT

4

Remediate existing dumping

We will target remedial efforts to address areas identified in Output 2.



OUTPUT

5

Prevention and deterrence

We will prevent and deter future dumping.



OUTPUT

6

Monitoring

We will measure and monitor the effectiveness of the strategy to inform continuous improvement.





OUTPUT 1: Project governance

We will establish strong governance with the right stakeholders to ensure success.

The working group comprises representatives from relevant Local and Territory Government Departments, Environment Groups, Traditional Owner Corporations and Rangers, Land Councils and Community groups.

The Working Group will meet regularly to track and progress and ensure the success of this plan.



OUTPUT 2: Understand the nature and scale of the problem

We will identify where illegal dumping is occurring and what wastes are being dumped.

Aerial imagery will be analysed by the Environment Regulation Division to inform the extent of illegal dumping in the greater Alice Springs region.

Mapping will (where possible) include information on the type of waste dumped and key 'hot spot' areas being accessed regularly for illegal dumping.



OUTPUT 3: Identify the cause

We will understand what's causing the problem.

We know that there are many reasons why people illegally dump waste. To understand the social, environmental, political and economic context of the Alice Springs region we will harness the collective local experience and expertise of the Working Group.

We will use the data generated from Output 2 to assess the local drivers of illegal dumping trends in Alice Springs. This will inform our strategy to prevent it happening in the future (Output 5).



OUTPUT 4: Remediate existing dumping

We will target remedial efforts to address areas identified in Output 2.

We understand that dumping begets dumping. That's why remediation of illegally dumped waste is so important.

The working group will focus remedial efforts to areas of interest identified in Output 2.

Remediation is proposed to be undertaken collaboratively by members of the working group including Local and Territory Government, Environment Groups, Traditional Owner Corporations and Rangers, Land Councils and Community groups.



OUTPUT 5: Prevention and deterrence

We will prevent and deter future dumping.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing illegal dumping and waste crime.

The working group will identify how the organisations they represent can collaborate to prevent and deter illegal dumping at targeted areas of interest (as identified in Output 2), for example by:

Educate

We know that the primary waste category being illegally dumped is domestic waste, including white goods. Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC) currently issues two complimentary waste disposal vouchers as part of a rates notice enabling house or unit owners to drop off two loads (max 2M³) of residential waste free of charge per annum. ASTC currently allows the disposal of white goods (1 per person), free of charge to the Regional Waste Management Facility once a month. Increasing education and awareness of these waste management initiatives will be a key focus for the working group members including ASTC.

Detect, deter, disrupt

We know that illegal dumping is most likely to occur in areas with minimal barriers to entry (i.e. where there are no fences or geophysical barriers etc.), foot traffic and surveillance. Working group members will collaborate to target key areas for prevention efforts by preventing accessibility to known areas of illegal dumping (where possible), installing camera traps, or “covert cameras” to help catch dumpers and taking enforcement action (financial penalties, “name and shame” opportunities etc.).

Persuade

We know that if waste has a value, it’s less likely to end up in the environment. We know that most of the waste detected in Output 2 was domestic in nature, which often includes low value wastes. The Environment Division will continue to drive the NT’s Circular Economy Strategy. The goal of the circular economy strategy is to keep waste inside the economy and outside of the environment. The current focus is on expanding the container deposit scheme and banning single use plastics.



OUTPUT 6: Monitoring

We will measure and monitor the effectiveness of the strategy to inform continuous improvement.

You can’t manage what you don’t measure! To ensure the ongoing effectiveness of our strategy, the Environment Regulation Division will use drones and mapping technology to measure and monitor the effectiveness of prevention and deterrence actions in key areas of interest (as informed by Output 2 and Output 5). Drone surveillance will be conducted quarterly (following clean-up activities) to assess the success of implemented actions at key areas of interest. Annual aerial imagery of the greater Alice Springs region will also be analysed to assess changes to baseline mapping identified in Output 2.



Department of
Lands, Planning and Environment

