

Healdsburg School Economics Students Present Illegal Dumping Mitigation Proposal to County Supervisor and Sonoma County Dept. of Environmental Health



Front row left to right: **Sebastian Kochinke, Britney Wells**. Middle row: **Savannah Kochinke, McKenna Frazer, Josh Micallef, Matilda Schroeter, Olivia Fleming, Lydia Cano, Supervisor Paul Kelley**. Back row: **Economics teacher Jack Strange, Director of Environmental Health Walt Kruse, Supervising Specialist of Environmental Health Christine Sosko, and Environmental Health Specialist Leslye Choate**.

[Wednesday, May 21, 2008] Eighth grade economics students at the Healdsburg School presented a proposal to eliminate illegal dumping in Sonoma County to Supervisor Paul Kelley and leaders of Sonoma County's Department of Environmental Health. The proposal was grounded in the investigation of the fundamental causes of illegal dumping, followed by crafting new incentives to encourage people to dump legally coupled with stronger enforcement measures to mitigate, if not completely eliminate, the blight of illegal dumping.

This proposal grew from a class project. Some months ago, economics teacher Jack Strange, recalled cycling from Sebastopol to Cloverdale and back through some of

the county's most beautiful roads. "I was disgusted by the amount of illegal dumping that despoils the picture postcard roads of our home... filthy mattresses, rusting refrigerators, old TV's, broken fans... trash. It was just awful," he said.

That experience and subsequent class discussion spurred the 8th graders into applying their understanding of basic economics principles to develop and propose market-based solutions that were centered on a recommendation to open up Sonoma County transfer stations to free dumping for resident, non-commercial users. "It is a solution that has been tried before and been successful," said eighth grader Lydia Cano. She added, "Is this an opportunity for problem solving leadership?"

County Supervisor Paul Kelley congratulated the students on the quality of the proposal, appreciated the recommendations that the students made and reiterated his support to eliminate this blight from the county once and for all.

Walt Kruse, the County's director of environmental health said that he was amazed at how closely the student's proposal mirrored efforts that county is now implementing as the result of recent half-million dollar grant curb illegal dumping. Christine Sosko, also of the County's Dept. of Environmental Health then asked the students if they would be willing to work with the county to get the message out that illegal dumping is more than just a nuisance... it is an environmental hazard that affects the quality of life of all the county's residents and is just too important to ignore.

The student's recommendations included a proposal to eliminate tipping fees for resident, non-commercial users at all the county's transfer stations along with stepped up enforcement. That would result in a revenue loss of a little more than \$10 million to be offset by an increase in monthly trash pickup fees of less than \$3.50 per month for all of the county's 245,000 residences and businesses. An additional savings of nearly \$380,000 that currently goes to clean up can then be redirected to enforcement. "The key is to align incentives to desired outcomes by not charging people for doing the right thing. We instead, want to 'charge' people for doing the wrong thing," said student Savannah Kochinke. She added, "It's all about accepting shared responsibility for this ugly problem."

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