

Navajo Nation to seek prosecution for illegal trash dumping

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BLACK MESA, Ariz. - The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency announced Aug. 23 that its Criminal Enforcement Department is working to address a case of illegal trash dumping in the community of Black Mesa, Ariz., which is in violation of the Navajo Nation Solid Waste Act, and will seek prosecution of the perpetrators.

Navajo Nation EPA Executive Director Oliver Whaley stated that a report of illegal dumping was recently made to the EPA's Western Navajo Agency office by local residents, which was then investigated. The Navajo Nation EPA has since cleaned up the illegal dumping site, which consisted of household debris and garbage. While cleaning up the site, the officials were able to identify several alleged perpetrators using names found in the debris.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer commended the Navajo Nation EPA for addressing the situation and the community members for raising the concern with the EPA. They cautioned that other similar offenses will be investigated to deter illegal trash dumping and to protect the environment. They said the Nez-Lizer Administration is working diligently to develop a landfill for the Navajo Nation to help address the issue of illegal dumping.

"We've heard directly from many of our own people regarding their concerns over illegal dumping in many communities and many have called for the prosecution of offenders. In every community, we have children that play outdoors and families that use our land for events, ceremonies, and many other purposes - it's important that we protect our lands and preserve them for these important uses," Nez stated. "This is a community driven effort to keep our lands clean and safe."

Vice President Lizer said he is hopeful that the situation in Black Mesa will serve as a reminder

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to perpetrators that the Nation will pursue prosecution for illegal trash dumping.

“As leaders of the Nation, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to work with communities to develop waste disposal plans and options for residents, businesses, and others and that’s why we have tasked several of our Division Directors to develop a plan and timeline to develop a landfill for the Nation’s use,” Vice President Lizer said.

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman, Division of General Services Executive Director Lomardo Aseret, and Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Executive Director Oliver Whaley are working together to establish a landfill to properly dispose of solid waste and to promote recycling in communities on the Nation.

“While we are still addressing the issuing of providing more convenient places for people to legally dump their trash, we as a Nation, can no longer be afraid [or] turn a blind eye to illegal dumping,” Whaley stated.

Among other provisions, the Navajo Nation Solid Waste Act prohibits the disposal of “any solid waste in a manner that will harm the environment, endanger the public health, safety and welfare or create a public nuisance.

The Nez-Lizer Administration also encourages communities to be proactive in addressing illegal trash dumping and to hold others accountable if this is occurring in your neighborhood.

The public is encouraged to report illegal trash dumping by calling the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency at (928) 871-7692.