

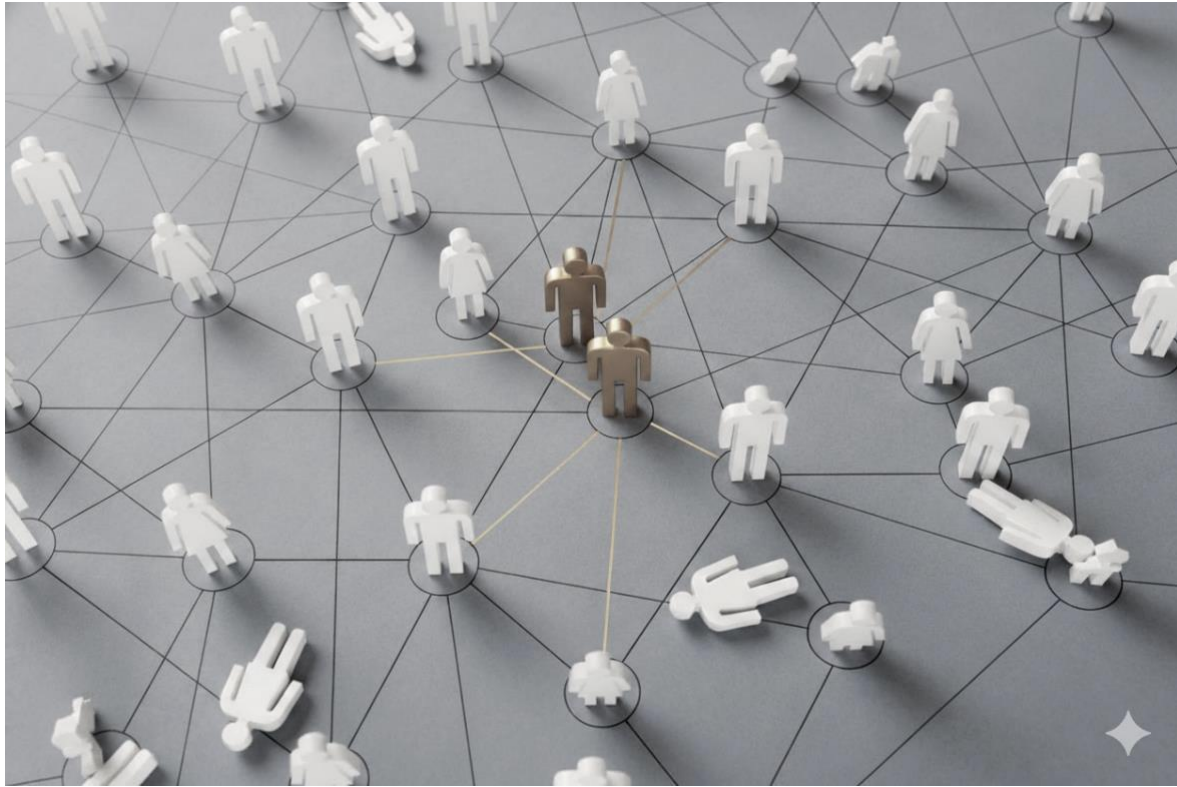
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Navigating the EPA Crackdown: Essential Waste Regulations, Penalties, and Prevention Strategies

By Andrew Swann

Illegal dumping is an environmental crime that costs Victoria over \$30 million annually in clean-up efforts for building and demolition waste alone.

To combat this, the Victorian Government has launched a \$21.5 million investment to bolster the Illegal Dumping Taskforce. With drones, ground-penetrating radar, and inter-agency intelligence now in play, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is watching. Here is the essential information every homeowner, builder, and business operator needs to stay compliant and avoid massive fines.

The Law: The General Environmental Duty and "Lawful Place"

In Victoria, it is an offence to dump, abandon, or bury any waste at a place not authorised to accept it—even using a neighbour's bin without permission is considered illegal dumping.

The *Environment Protection Act 2017* introduced the **General Environmental Duty (GED)**, legally requiring every Victorian to take proactive steps to reduce the risks of harm from their waste.

For businesses, the law mandates that all industrial and hazardous waste must be deposited at a "**lawful place**"—a facility legally permitted by the EPA to receive that specific material. Crucially, **the chain of responsibility applies**: if you hire an unlicensed contractor who dumps your hazardous waste illegally, your business can still be prosecuted.

The Staggering Financial Risks

The penalties for flouting Victoria's waste laws are severe:

- **On-the-spot fines:** \$363 for individuals and \$1,817 for corporations.
- **Maximum court penalties:** Up to **\$800,000 or five years in prison for individuals**.
- **Contaminated Land Liability:** On private property, the landowner is generally responsible for the clean-up, even if a trespasser or tenant dumped the waste. Remediation of polluted soil or groundwater can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A Cautionary Tale: The devastating potential of illegal dumping is best seen in the Lemon Springs disaster, where the EPA uncovered 32 buried trenches hiding immense quantities of hazardous materials, including asbestos and 15,000 gas cylinders. The clean-up required a massive \$20 million budget.

Proactive Prevention

Prevention is always cheaper than a clean-up.

- **Secure your sites:** Builders and landowners should keep sites clean, use proper containment, and install temporary security fencing to deter casual dumpers.
- **Use CCTV carefully:** Cameras are a great deterrent, but you must comply with Victoria's *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*. Always display clear signage that CCTV is operating, and **disable audio recording** by default, as recording private conversations without consent is heavily restricted.
- **Verify your contractors:** Always ensure your waste removalist is licensed and taking your waste to an EPA-approved lawful place.

How to Report Illegal Dumping

If you witness illegal dumping, do not approach the dumpers or touch the waste. Record the location, time, vehicle license plate, and take photos if safe to do so.

- **If you catch someone in the act:** Call **Triple Zero (000)** immediately so police can intervene.
- **For large-scale or hazardous dumping:** Call the 24/7 **EPA Victoria Pollution Hotline on 1300 372 842**.
- **For local household dumping:** Contact your local council or use the **Snap Send Solve** app to quickly submit photos directly to local authorities