

saving_our_streams_03

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

trash, waterways, houston, biggest polluters, oil, part, picked, stream, litter, dumped, dumper, people, camera shutter, wildlife, recycling, dumping, problem, soda pop bottles, sites, bayou

SPEAKERS

Dee Owens, Norm Uhl, , Steve Dicker, Bayou Posse spokesperson

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Norm Uhl 00:05

There's a perception among some people that the biggest polluters of our waterways are our industries. Fact is industry has done much to save our streams. The biggest polluters now are people. Citizens of our area who litter and in some cases intentionally dump trash and oil and chemicals into our streams. In part three of this series we'll meet a law enforcement team whose job is taking out the trash. A work crew cleans up trash along a 100-yard stretch of the Houston Ship Channel. There are many sites like this along Houston area waterways, and what's not picked up can be carried to Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. This work crew is part of the Bayou Posse program which utilizes the free labor of probationers.

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Bayou Posse spokesperson 00:54

They're people who are given probation, you know, given another opportunity, and they'll get anywhere from 80 hours to 360 hours of community service. Last year, we performed over \$12 million in free services.

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Norm Uhl 01:06

Work on this site is not yet complete, but just look at what they've picked up so far.

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Dee Owens 01:12

This is our recyclable plastic, mostly soda pop bottles. And here's a real problem. These are one quart oil cans, and they're not recyclable and produce a lot of problems in the waterways. And of course, this is Styrofoam. Over here you see the big stack of wood. That'll be ground up and then it will become topsoil again and will go back into the system. The tires will be recycled. And of course they could have been recycled from the start. Just about everything that we pick up will end up being recycled and it'll become assets instead of [an] eyesore.

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Norm Uhl 01:34

The probationers are suddenly very big on the idea of recycling and at the very least proper disposal of trash. They've had quite an education on trash, including where it originates. Much of it is street litter, items thrown out of car windows, which are then carried by winds and rainwater runoff to storm drains. Which empty into Houston's bayous. Some of the trash is dumped directly onto the banks of Houston waterways by illegal dumpers.

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Steve Dicker 02:19

We've got a report of automobile parts being dumped into Greens Bayou.

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Norm Uhl 02:25

Houston police officer Steve Dicker is hot on their trails. He's part of an eight-person unit at Houston's Neighborhood Protection Team.

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Steve Dicker 02:36

Probably about 75% of the time we can locate a dumper either through an eyewitness or through trace evidence. We set up stings in certain areas of town when we have a proficient amount of constant dumping and we do usually prosecute multiple cases.

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02:50

[Camera shutter sounds]

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Norm Uhl 02:56

These are surveillance pictures and video taken last year at a Houston hotspot for oil dumping. This dead end street became a magnet for people working on their cars, and in most cases the old oil was dumped onto the banks of a stream. This even though the state along with auto parts stores has set up a network of sites where old oil can be dropped off for recycling. Look at any Houston stream following a rain, and chances are you will see a sheen of oil on the surface. That along with the trash is certainly unsightly. But it can also be fatal to wildlife. Whether it's a bird choked by a plastic six pack ring, or animals dying from starvation because their stomachs are full of undigestible bits of plastic. For those who litter it is perhaps a matter of convenience. But to the wildlife, there is nothing convenient about trash in the waterways.