

## Thousands of tires removed from Passaic River in Fair Lawn

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Fair Lawn - Roughly 2,000 illegally dumped tires were removed from the Passaic River in Fair Lawn after weeks of cleaning by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC).



PHOTO/BOB KING

Tires removed from the Passaic River are stacked up in the park. Illegally dumped tires are moved to the river banks in Fair Lawn by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission.



A team of a half-dozen PVSC workers used a single boat to clear waters from behind Memorial Middle School to the bridge on Maple Avenue. The tires, both commercial and passenger - with some dating back to the 1950s and 60s - were lifted one by one using ropes and cables.

If stacked vertically, the stockpile would surpass the roof of New York City's newly debuted One World Trade Center.

PVSC Executive Director Michael Defrancis said his crew is removing not years, but decades of pollution.

"It's tough. One of the most difficult things is to figure out where they come from," Defrancisi said. "Towns can certainly try to be as diligent as possible to deter people from throwing stuff over the river banks, but short of putting up walls and fences everywhere...it's difficult."

A possible influence, Defrancisi said, can be traced back to gas stations and tire shops, when years ago many imposed a fee to collect used tires. This year Bridgestone offered a tractor trailer to pick up the dislodged tires free of charge.

For the PVSC, tire pollution presents both health and flooding concerns. In warmer months exposed tires are known to attract mosquito nesting. Local floods are also exacerbated by tire and debris buildup.

"(Cleaning) keeps the water flowing freely. When you get high water conditions (tires) back things up," Defrancisi said.

Each year the PVSC dedicates a few weeks to a major cleanup project. Tires are more visible in low-water conditions during the fall. Last year a similar effort in the Passaic River along Paterson netted more than 1,000 tires.

Because lining riverfronts with fencing is expensive and unpractical, Defrancisi believes the best way to curb local pollution is through education.

"We're in the schools all year long trying to teach kids, getting to them at a young age about the dangers of pollution. This is certainly one of them," he said.

The New Jersey Environmental Protection Agency has eyed eventually making the Passaic River both fishable and swimmable. Given years of trash buildup, along with the dumping of dioxins and other harmful sediments, Defrancisi said it's a lofty goal, but not unattainable.

"It has a long way to go but it's much better than it used to be," he said.

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