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**THREE COUNTY RESIDENTS SENTENCED FOR COMMITTING
ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES**

**Illegal disposal of trash continue to be a big problem in remote
communities**

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodriguez today announced the sentencing of 3 county residents accused of violating the Clean Air Act and the state Illegal Dumping statute in three different, unrelated cases.

In the first case, Montana Vista resident Josefina Valenzuela pleaded guilty to one count of illegal outdoor burning, in violation of the Texas Water Code section 7.177. Valenzuela was sentenced to 12 months deferred probation, \$5,000 fine (\$4,500 probated), 100 hours of community service, a \$25 donation to the Salvation Army, and court costs.

The offense occurred on or about September 13, 2007 when Valenzuela was burning household trash and weeds, in her back yard, at 3429 Mapula, in far East El Paso County. The fire got out of control and sent into the sky a large amount of smoke, which Sheriff's deputies saw while on patrol in the area. Deputies found a vacuum cleaner, tires, a couch, plastic buckets, a vehicle seat, pieces of a sheet metal tool shed, and other household trash in the fire.

In the second case, Hueco Mountain Estates resident, Trinidad Mejía pleaded guilty to two counts of illegal dumping (transporting and disposing), in violation of the Texas Health and Safety Code, section 365.012. Mejia was sentenced to 12 months deferred probation, \$1,000 fine, 100 hours community service at the Clint landfill, clean-up the illegally dumped waste (which he had already done), and court costs.

The offense occurred on or about March 22, 2008, when the reporter and her husband were walking in the desert area, approximately ½ mile northwest of the 17000 block of Shifrin, in El Paso County, Texas. At the site, the reporter found a large illegal dumpsite that covered

approximately 270 square feet of land. Sheriff's Deputy Raul Galván responded to the call and retrieved a piece of paper with the name and address of the defendant from the dumped trash, which consisted of construction materials, plastics, pieces of carpet, a baby stroller and burnt items.

The third case involved Fabens resident Rumaldo Madrid, who pleaded guilty to two counts of illegal dumping (transporting and disposing), in violation of the Texas Health and Safety Code, section 365.012. Judge Alma Trejo, of the County Criminal Court at Law #1 -the Environmental Court- sentenced Madrid to 90 days in jail plus court costs.

The offense occurred on or about May 14, 2008, when Felipe Triste, a Maintenance Supervisor with the El Paso County Road and Bridge Dept., called the Sheriff's Department to report an illegal dumping in the alley at 117 NW G St., in Fabens, Texas. The dumped trash consisted of household trash. Evidence retrieved from the dump site lead deputies to the owner of the trash, who told deputies that he had paid Mr. Madrid \$10 to dispose of the trash, because he had missed his scheduled trash collection. Instead of taking the trash to the Clint landfill, Mr. Madrid illegally disposed of it in an alley. Mr. Triste provided a statement that 6 yards of loose trash were picked up, and estimated that it cost the County approximately \$500.00 in labor, equipment, and disposal costs, to clean-up the alley.

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez said that "Illegal dumping and outdoor burning are serious environmental crimes which we will prosecute to the fullest extent of the law."

"The illegal dumping of household trash continues throughout our community, despite efforts by the County to order trash collection in the unincorporated areas of El Paso County. It is an eyesore and it is bad for the environment because it contaminates the land and breeds vermin. Illegal dumping costs taxpayers thousands of dollars per year in investigation, prosecution, and clean-up costs, moneys that we could be spending on other worthwhile projects," Rodríguez explained.

The penalty for illegal dumping ranges from a fine up to \$10,000 for an individual, or up to 2 years in jail, or both fine and incarceration. For an association or corporation, the fine is up to \$10,000.

Rodríguez explained that burning trash illegally is also an on-going problem in the county of El Paso, and he stressed that the County Attorney's Office will continue to prosecute such offenders. "Burning waste, especially tires, is dangerous and bad for the environment because it contaminates the already polluted air we breathe, and it could potentially harm our drinking water," Rodríguez said.

The penalty for illegal outdoor burning ranges from a fine of not less than \$1000 to up to \$50,000 for an individual, or up to 180 days in jail, or both. For an association or corporation, the fine cannot be less than \$1,000 or more than \$1000.

To report illegal outdoor burning or other environmental crime, call your local law enforcement agency. The Environmental Hotline at 1-888-6EL-PASO, El Paso Police Dept. at 832-4400, or El Paso Sheriff's Dept. at 546-2280.

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