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State orders Clover couple, neighbor to clean tire dump

BY JIE JENNY ZOU
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CLOVER — The Bohelers are tired of tires. Since February, the York County husband and wife have spent their free time digging up old tires in a ravine at the edge of their property northwest of Clover.

"I wake up thinking about tires," said Gary Boheler, 61, a landscaper who now spends weekends removing tires from the gully on his property.

He and his wife, Donna, said they didn't pay attention to a gully dozens of yards from their home on Lloyd White Road that was brimming with old tires when they bought the property in 1985.

They figured the pit — which spans two other properties — was a vestige of a bygone era where tires were once used to prevent erosion.

So when the Bohelers received a notice from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control ordering them to clean up the mess at the end of January, it came as a surprise.

But the question on Donna Boheler's mind wasn't why, but how. "We have thousands and thousands," she said. "If anybody wants some, they can come get some," she joked.

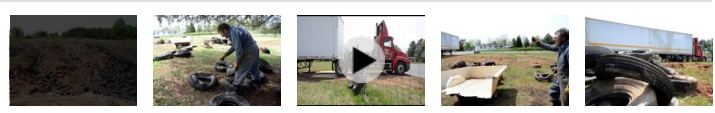
Last week, a tractor-trailer packed with hundreds of tires was hauled away after two months of efforts by the Bohelers and church volunteers. The tires from the dump were sent to a chipping facility in Concord, N.C.

Based on York County estimates, the couple is expected to go through at least seven more trailers for a total of 128 tons of rubber.

Tackling that volume has been a logistical nightmare for the Bohelers, who are being granted 30-day extensions at a time to continue the cleanup or face state penalties.



Thousands of tires line a gully in an illegal dump in Clover. Homeowners responsible for cleanup say the dump predates their ownership of the land. **JIE JENNY ZOU** — jzou@heraldonline.com





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The couple is seeking a longer extension to postpone cleanup until the fall because of the threat of snakes. Kudzu has begun to wrap itself around tires deep inside the gully, making cleanup tougher, said Gary Boheler.

The mandatory order has also raised questions about the origin and history of the dump and the funding sources available to property owners ordered to clean it up.

Who's responsible?

After the Bohelers have cleared their share of tires, neighbor Joey Thompson is expected to step in and finish it, according to DHEC.

A third property owner has already removed a few tires on her property line.

Thompson, 43, a city of Gastonia, N.C., employee, said he is unable to physically reach his part of the gully without entering the Bohelers' cleanup area first.

"We didn't know anything about it when we bought it – we didn't have an inkling," Thompson said of the dump. He purchased his home in 2002.

Thompson said he's angry that he is being held responsible for a mess he didn't create and is consulting with a lawyer to consider legal options.

The Bohelers said they lack funds to retain legal help and have been reassured by DHEC officials that no fines will be levied so long as they continue cleanup efforts – no matter how long it takes.

But Thompson said that when the order was sent out in January, officials gave him the "runaround." He is seeking information regarding whoever dumped the tires in the first place.

"They know we're not responsible," he said of DHEC's investigation. "They're not trying to do as much as they can to help us out."

He estimates he has a quarter of the gully's tires on his property.

"I wish they would take the responsibility," Thompson said of the state's role in allowing the dump to remain unreported for decades. "They're as much responsible as we are."

DHEC spokesman Jim Beasley wrote in an email that "it is very common that we are first made aware of illegal dumping by vigilant citizens who see a potential problem area and report it to us."

According to a DHEC report, investigators received a tip about the dump in September, but didn't notify homeowners until the end of January.

Under a 1991 law, the state deferred responsibility of tire disposal to individual counties. The state Department of Revenue annually collects and distributes \$1.44 of every tire sold in the state to counties to collect, process or recycle waste tires.

DHEC officials said that their role is to provide oversight of the cleanup and track proper tire disposal, not fund or conduct cleanup.

It's unclear how DHEC will ensure all tires are properly disposed of because investigators noted the total amount of tires located on the properties is "unknown."

Ongoing cleanup

The Bohelers said they're taking the cleanup in stride, seeking volunteers and appealing to lawmakers for equipment loans to speed up the process.

"It's either that or run away screaming and crying," Donna Boheler said.

A team of middle-school students and volunteers from the Bridge Community Church recently helped the couple manually load tires into a trailer.

The couple is hoping to borrow a backhoe, which would allow them to mechanically load the trailer instead of having volunteers physically climb into it to deposit tires.

Eric Rekitt, York County's assistant public works director, estimates the Bohelers will require at least eight 16-ton tractor-trailers at a cost of \$90 per ton.

He estimates the county will spend a total of \$12,000 just for hauling and disposal costs – not including the hours of manual labor needed to fetch tires and load trailers.

According to Rekitt, the county receives roughly \$70,000 annually from the state for tire disposal. The Bohelers' trailers are supplied by U.S. Tire Recycling, Inc., a county-contracted Concord

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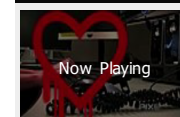
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company.

U.S. Tire is one of 13 DHEC-approved tire disposal companies, which includes contractors in New York and Maryland.

But the tires are more than just a nuisance, the mounds can become breeding grounds for pests like rats, snakes, and mosquitoes – which are attracted to trapped heat and water.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, tires aren't considered hazardous waste unless they combust, releasing harmful chemicals and vapors. Tire fires can last for months, becoming so toxic that sites are placed on a mandatory federal cleanup program.

Households surrounding the gully all use private wells and are not connected to a central municipal water supply, making them sensitive to underground water contamination from various sources.

Because of the age of the tires, Rekitt said, the Clover tires are ineligible for recycling. According to EPA estimates, the majority of recycled tire rubber is reused as fuel. Old tires are also exported to Mexico and Japan to be retreaded.

Gary Boheler has begun taking a closer look at the tires for clues about their origin and found that several of them were manufactured locally in Clover according to tire imprints.

The Bohelers said they're unsure where the tires came from and say they've never dumped a single tire themselves. They estimate that dumping stopped long before they purchased their home.

"I'm most thankful and humble we have friends that have given up their time with their families to help do this," said Donna Boheler, who said she became so desperate she called the York County Sheriff's Office to see if inmates could help.

The dump's location on private property makes it ineligible for prison work detail and any direct county manpower.

The threat of fines and the unknown number of tires linger over the Bohelers, who have not yet heard back from any lawmakers on equipment rentals or assistance.

"This is worrying him to death," Donna said of Gary, who suffered a heart attack last year and hasn't slept well since February. "I'm not willing to lose my husband over this."

Jie Jenny Zou • 803-329-4062




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Michael Steiniger · ★ Top Commenter · Works at Retired/Disabled

Again the county or state want any part of this problem. I am sure the road is county or state maintained with workers driving down this road on a regular basis. And what about the law enforcement officers that drive down the road, do they turn a blind eye to a problem when they see one (that is if they know about this type of violation). What about the county inspectors, tax officials and a number of other people that could have said or even done something about this years ago. It is always easier to tell the "owners" of the property years after a problem was created, it is time to clean up someone else's mess. I am sure if the state or county would have needed this land, they would have secured it one way or another but since they didn't need it, they wanted nothing to do with assisting in the cleanup. It is funny how the government officials always want the help of the citizens with projects but they are not around when the citizen needs their help with problems.

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Brad Pierce · ★ Top Commenter

I find it hard to believe that county/state officials knew nothing about this until recently..But you have to admit, If these folks who bought these properties would have walked it before purchase, I wonder if they would have went through with purchasing or not?? I would have made the seller clean it up before I bought it..And I am sure a VA. Inspector would have made it mandatory, not to mention an insurance co. inspection before closing !!

Reply · Like · 1 · April 18 at 5:45am



Ezell Ron · ★ Top Commenter · Driver at Christian Tours

Someone that lives in this area, especially the oldtimers need to step up and tell who did this. I would say someone connected to a tire business.

Reply · Like · April 18 at 5:00am



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ya think ??

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