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ADEQ Director Owens Leads Yuma Forum on Illegal Dumping

YUMA (March 7, 2008) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) Director Steve Owens today told city and county officials that prevention is the best solution to illegal dumping of trash in Arizona.

Director Owens led a forum on illegal dumping at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) Yuma Office and Yuma Desalting Plant. Citizens and public officials from throughout the state exchanged ideas and techniques on how to prevent and deal with the problem of illegal dumping.

“Illegal dumping is a major problem in the Yuma area and throughout Arizona and dealing with illegal dumping is a priority for ADEQ,” Director Owens said. “Illegal dumps present serious environmental issues because they have hazardous materials that can contaminate soil and groundwater. These dump sites also create health risks because they serve as ‘vectors’ for rodents and vermin that carry diseases, and they create problems for property values and economic development.”

Director Owens added that parts of Southern Arizona are experiencing particular problems with dumping by people crossing the border illegally who are contaminating the desert with clothes, medicine and medical devices, personal care products and other potentially hazardous items.

“The trashing of the desert by border crossers is a huge problem,” Director Owens said. “We have been working with officials at the federal and local levels, as well as community groups, to develop a strategy for addressing this enormous issue and organizing cleanups of waste that has been left in the desert.”

Owens said that he established ADEQ’s Illegal Dumping Prevention Program to provide assistance to local officials who deal with illegal dumping and to help inform the public about the problem. The program identifies opportunities for ADEQ to support local government and community prevention efforts across Arizona. He added that ADEQ is also helping local communities with enforcement against illegal dumpers.

“One challenge is that many people who are dumping materials in the desert and elsewhere don’t think they will be caught,” Owens said. “There also are others who have the mistaken idea that it’s legal to create these dump sites. Our experience has shown that aggressive, coordinated enforcement combined with good outreach efforts to inform the public can go a long way towards addressing the problem.”