

## Updated Nuisance Code

### Tacoma's ordinance

The City of Tacoma Public Nuisance Code was revised in February 2010. Here is a summary of some of the items covered under the new code. For specific acts, omissions, places, conditions and things declared to be nuisances please call (253) 591-5001 and request a copy of the Public Nuisance Code.

#### What the code does:

The Public Nuisance Code provides for the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Tacoma. It protects the quality of life of neighborhoods from urban blight by providing standards for the appearance and condition of properties.

#### What is a public nuisance?

Generally a public nuisance consists of doing an unlawful act, or omitting to perform a duty, or permitting an action or condition to occur or exist that intrudes on the ability of neighbors or citizens to use or enjoy their properties or public property adjacent to where the nuisance occurs. Some nuisances referred to in the new code are: deteriorated fencing or structures, littered, trash covered, or overgrown or unkempt vegetation of any type and grasses over one foot in height, improper parking or storage of vehicles on single family residential lots that impedes the use of yard areas for light, air circulation, recreation, and landscaping.

#### The process:

If a complaint against the property is filed and a violation is found, a letter will be sent asking that the violation be corrected. If the condition has not been corrected, the City of Tacoma may abate the public nuisance and bill the owner for all the costs in connection with the abatement or alternatively send a second Notice of Violation and a civil penalty of \$250 will be assessed. Additional monetary penalties of \$500 may also be assessed if the condition is not corrected.

## Maintaining right-of-way

### Property owners' obligations

The City of Tacoma requires abutting property owners to take care of street rights-of-way from their property lines out to the curbs or edges of pavement (includes sidewalks and planting strips). The City also requires care of alleys out to the edge of pavement or, if unpaved, out to the centerline. Call Facilities/Real Property Services at (253) 591-5260 for more information

#### On Street Right-Of-Way

There are a number of conditions that abutting property owners are responsible for preventing from happening in rights-of-way, or permitting to remain upon any part of the right-of-way (including the planting strip).

- Defective sidewalk surfaces.
- Cement surfaces placed adjacent to the public sidewalk.
- Defects in sidewalks or public ways caused or contributed to by the roots of trees.

- Defective conditions caused by tree limbs, foliage, brush, or grass on or extending over public sidewalks.
- Defects resulting from accumulation of ice and snow on public sidewalks or on the right-of-way.
- Defects consisting of foreign matter on the public sidewalks, including, but not limited to, gravel and oil.
- Defective handrails or fences or other similar structures within or immediately adjacent to the right-of-way.
- Basketball hoops, bicycle ramps, skateboard ramps or other similar structures or obstructions within the right-of-way area.
- Uncultivated plants (whether growing or otherwise), weeds, tall grass, uncultivated shrubs or growth higher than two feet that are allowed to remain in or upon any street, avenue, or alley.

#### Trees And Shrubs – Trimming & Removal

It is the owners' responsibility to trim overhanging vegetation. All trees, plants, shrubs, or vegetation that overhang and obstruct the full use of the sidewalk or street must be removed by the owner of the property on which they're situated. This includes interference with the clear vision of pedestrians or most vehicles, interference with poles, wires, pipes, fixtures, or any part of a public utility in the right-of-way. Also included is any vegetation which is a fire hazard or menace to public health, safety, or welfare. The vegetation should be removed or destroyed by the owner of the property on which it's situated. Contact the City of Tacoma urban forester at (253) 591-2048 to see if you will need a FREE permit to trim or remove trees.

## Garbage Collection

It is the property owner's responsibility to assure that rights-of-way are unobstructed by overgrown vegetation that hinders the operation of the collection vehicle. Solid Waste Management will notify the property owner, in writing, to remove the obstruction within 48 hours. If notification or arrangements have not been made, Solid Waste Management will remove any obstruction and charge the property owner for the actual cost of the removal. This cost will be billed to the property owner.

## Keeping your yard shipshape

### Here are some tips

- Taking the time to hire a reputable landscape contractor can assure quality work for home repairs and renovations at a fair price. Here are some suggestions:
- Hire only a licensed and bonded contractor.
- Call the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals at 1-800-833-2186 to make sure the contractor is properly qualified.
- Ask friends and neighbors for references and the contractor for references from past customers.
- Determine your budget. Get at least three bids for the work. Most contractors will provide bids at no cost, but be sure to ask if there is a charge when you request a bid. Ask about any costs you don't understand before you sign a contract.
- Make sure you understand any contract you sign, and never sign any contract that doesn't specify what work will be done, the charges, when work will begin and how long the work will take.

## Lawn Care

Use organic fertilizers rather than synthetic fertilizers. In particular, use horse food/alfalfa pellets (50 lbs/1,000 sq ft). This mix increases the ability of the soil to hold water, reduces soil compaction and related run-off and erosion, and increases the activity of tiny beneficial soil microbes which slowly feed the plants. Mowing, even if it is only four times a year, will also minimize weed infestations.

## Trees

There is no such thing as a "bad tree"; it just needs to be planted and cared for in the right place. Roots can break pipes and water and sewer lines as well as damage sidewalks. Overhanging limbs can also damage roofs or interfere with power lines. Call the Washington State Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener Program at (253) 798-7170 or Tacoma Power at (253) 502-8729 for advice on trees. Get qualified help by looking in the telephone directory under "Trees" if trimming or removing the tree is too big a job for you. Please call (253) 591-2048 for trees in the right-of-way.

## TAGRO Mix

Use TAGRO the same way you would use steer manure to enrich your soil for a greener, healthier lawn. Remember, TAGRO also encourages grass to grow faster and thicker and requires more work keeping the lawn cut. For more information on where to get TAGRO and how to use it call the Environmental Services Division at (253) 502-2150.

## Water Conservation

Water wisely. Efficient irrigation makes a big difference, because nearly 80 percent of landscaping problems are caused by over-watering. Water less often, but more thoroughly.

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It's better for the plants, conserves water and also reduces your bill. For more information about water conservation or to request water-saving devices call Tacoma Water at (253) 505-8723.

**Noxious Weeds**

Are there weeds in the yard that may be harmful? Pierce County Noxious Weed Board can assist you in identifying potentially dangerous weeds. Call (253) 798-7263.

**Ridding Rats**

The best way to avoid rats is to keep the yard clean of garbage, pet food and animal feed, fallen fruit, food scraps and vegetable compost. Keeping grass and bushes trimmed, removing junk piles and other debris like stacked wood, limits where rodents can breed. Be very careful about using poison because children or pets may be at risk. Rat traps are a much better choice. Call the Washington State Department of Health at 1-888-586-9427 to get a free brochure on rat control.

**Prune It & Dump It**

A resident of Tacoma can haul vegetation to the City of Tacoma landfill for FREE. Be prepared to show your driver's license and a recent copy of your City of Tacoma utility bill. Remember: a covered load is required when hauling to keep streets clean.

**Yard Waste and Recycling Collection**

The City of Tacoma offers 90-gallon brown containers to its residents for yard waste (no rocks, construction debris or sod). The City can also supply 30-, 60-, or 90-gallon blue containers for recycling most plastic, metal cans and paper products. Special smaller containers for glass and batteries are available as well. Pick up is every other

week. Call Solid Waste Management at (253) 591-5543 to sign up for this FREE service.

**Junk Vehicle**

The City of Tacoma can help. A road use compliance officer or a Code Enforcement Officer will, for NO charge, verify junk vehicles left on private property so you can have it towed away. Junk vehicles must meet three of the following conditions:

- At least three years old
  - Extensively damaged
  - Apparently inoperable
  - Has fair market value, equal only to its approximate scrap value
- Call (253) 591-5001

**Looking for assistance?**

These programs can help

**Household Debris Removal**

The Call-2-Haul program is a FREE service offered to residents of Tacoma living in single-family homes or duplexes. Each household is allowed pick up of three large items and household debris up to two times a year. For more information on what can be collected or to schedule a pick up, call City of Tacoma Solid Waste Management at (252) 573-2468.

**Vehicle Removal**

Do you have a used personal vehicle on your property that needs to be moved? Donate it to one of the agencies below. A FREE pick up will be arranged and you may qualify for a tax deduction.

A few conditions apply:

- Vehicles must be complete with no missing parts.
- Person donating vehicle must have clear title.
- Call for more information on their services:
- National Kidney Foundation 1-888-3-KIDNEY

- Habitat for Humanity 1-877-277-4344
- Cars for Homes Program 1-877-277-4344
- Washington Council of the Blind 1-800-576-2956

**Code Enforcement**

The Junk Vehicle, Minimum Building and Structures and the Public Nuisance Code issues are enforced in cooperation with the CARES phone line. Call (253) 591-5001 to report an unkempt property.

**Home Maintenance**

Volunteer Chore Services provides seniors and disabled people with help on small home repairs (changing a light bulb, faucet washer or furnace filter, for example). Yard work (mostly lawn mowing) is provided by Remann Hall work crews once or twice a summer. Call (253) 502-2690 for income eligibility and availability.

**HEROS Helping Elders through Referral and Outreach Services**

Helps at-risk older adults who need various kinds of services including personal needs and home condition assessment.

Call 1-888-445-8120 or the Crisis Line at 1-800-576-7764

The City of Tacoma does not discriminate in any programs or services.



If you need the information contained in this brochure in an alternative format, please contact the Public Works Department, Community Based Services, 747 Market Street, Room 208, Tacoma, WA 98402-3701. You may also call (253) 591-5634 (voice) or 711 (TTY)

[www.cityoftacoma.org](http://www.cityoftacoma.org)

For additional information

**Phone numbers at a glance...**

Area code 253 unless noted

**City**

- Facilities/Real Property Services .....591-5260
- Call-2-Haul .....573-2468
- Tacoma CARES phone line .....591-5001
- Code Enforcement
- Junk vehicles
- TAGRO Mix .....502-2150
- Tree cutting permits
- Trees in the right-of-way .....591-2048

**State**

- Washington State Cooperative Ext. Service Master Gardener Program .798 -7170
- Department of Health .....1-888-586-9427

**Utilities**

- Solid Waste .....591-5543
- Tacoma Power .....502-8363
- Tree trimming .....502-8729
- Tacoma Water .....502-8384
- Water Conservation .....502-8723

**Other**

- Habitat for Humanity.....1-877-277-4344
- HEROS Outreach Services for Seniors .....1-800-445-8120 or Crisis Line .....1-800-576-7764
- National Kidney Foundation
- Vehicle Donation .....1-888-3-KIDNEY

**Pierce County**

- Community Services .....798-6936
- Noxious Weed Board .....798-7263
- Safe Streets Campaign .....272-6824
- Volunteer Chore Services .....502-2690
- Washington Association of Landscape Professionals ....1-800-833-2186
- Washington Council of the Blind .....1-800-576-2956

**Neighborhood Resources**

- Safe Streets Campaign .....272-6824
- Hilltop Coalition .....383-3056



Public Works Department  
Community Based Services  
747 Market Street, Room 208  
Tacoma, WA 98402-3701  
[www.cityoftacoma.org](http://www.cityoftacoma.org)

**What is your YARD telling you?**

Your yard is a reflection of you; take pride in it.



- Old lumber, tires, boxes and other debris are scattered around.
- The car in the yard doesn't run anymore.
- The grass is too high and needs regular cutting through the season.
- The recycling and garbage cans are overflowing.
- The fence is broken and has missing boards.

