

# Olympics: Illegal dump tarnishes 'green' Sochi Games

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Trucks unload rubbish at a dumping ground near the village of Gorny Vozdukh some 14 km outside of the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi on February 21, 2013. Away from the construction bustle of Sochi's Olympic Park, where Russia will host the Winter Olympics next February, residents of a small community of Uch-Dere north of central Sochi have seen only the filthy side of preparations.

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preparations.

Uch-Dere, a village about 40 kilometres up the [Black Sea](#) coast from the [Olympic Park](#), is the site of greater Sochi's only waste site.

And despite years of promises to close it as part of the Sochi Olympics environmental programme, locals fight a nightly war with illegal dump trucks that bring garbage from all over the city.

"Just when the Olympic preparations began, we started having this problem," said Khamsat Kravchenko, a resident and activist in Uch-Dere. "Waste began to be brought here from the entire Sochi area."

Locals of Uch-Dere and three other villages have complained about the [health hazards](#), but the pile of trash just kept growing. Despite a new waste treatment plant built under the Olympic plan in Sochi, many of trucks still unload trash less than 200 metres from the nearest houses.

What before was a small compost pit in the valley used by local farmers is now a site of over 12 hectares, a 50-metre-high mountain of waste with trucks and people moving about ant-like on its stinking plateau.

Lack of insulation or walls around it leads to constant erosion while the dark-brown stream running through the area delivers pollutants straight to the Black Sea shore one kilometre away, where several health resorts are located.

Russian authorities have proclaimed the 2014 Winter Games "green", and vouched to solve the Black Sea coast's waste problem. In June, Sochi's mayor declared the dump closed, and regional authorities announced a programme to turn it into a park.

But with one year to go before the Games, no work appeared to have

been done. Instead, dump trucks kept arriving on a recent morning, and the giant heap smouldered even on a rainy day.



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— 'The problem of waste is solved' —

One hundred years ago, Uch-Dere, a spectacular cape on Russia's [Black Sea coast](#) covered by lush greenery, was picked by the Russian tsarist family for dachas.

Maria Feodorovna, the mother of Russia's last tsar Nicholas II, built a

special resort for the country's orphaned girls there in 1913. The building was later made into a Soviet tuberculosis clinic.

Today the dump sits only about 1.5 kilometres away from the clinic, scaring tourists away from the beach below and raising fears about the potential health dangers for its 10,000 residents.

"I don't understand how it could come to this," Kravchenko said, raising fears of a link to two recent child cancer cases.

"Why can't the city sort the waste, as it's done in civilised countries?"

When asked by AFP about Sochi's waste problem at a press conference this month, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak denied its existence.

"The problem of household waste is currently solved," he said. "We decided to transport all waste away from the coast as part of the Olympic programme," he said, adding that it ends up at a special "waste processing plant" in Belorechensk, a town over 100 kilometres away.

"As far as illegal dumps," Kozak added, "we need for the regional enforcement agencies to be effective."

Locals however say police have threatened to prosecute them when they complained. When they held a protest last year, several people were arrested.

A report on Krasnodar region's Channel 9 from Belorechensk this week indicated that there was no sorting plant there, as Kozak said. Instead, waste from Sochi was simply dumped at the local landfill.

"The site is not fit for such volumes of waste," a municipal official in Belorechensk told the channel, while locals in the report were putting

together a petition to turn the trucks back to Sochi.

On the website of the Sochi Organising Committee, the "Zero waste" programme promises an "up-to-date system of waste management", "non-waste technologies", and recycling even before preparation for the Games is complete.

"Zero waste means that all waste produced during the Games is treated on-site," said Organising Committee chief Dmitry Chernyshenko this month. "But we go much further in our environmental responsibilities."

— 'Before, there were apple orchards'—

Standing near the dump, another local, Akop Sunguryan, said he was tired of the empty promises.

"It's covered by 50 metres of waste now, but before there were apple orchards, water springs, my father's cows grazed there, everything was there," Sunguryan said emotionally pointing at the vast stretches of the dump below his village.

While tourism is the main source of income for people with coastal properties, Sunguryan's community, about one kilometre from the sea, relies mostly on farming. It has no gas supply, so people heat their houses with firewood. Sunguryan earns a living by growing daffodils and making wine.

One year ago, his and other small villages surrounding the dump pooled their resources and hired one of Russia's best-known lawyers Genrikh Padva, who represented jailed oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky and former defence minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

In June a district court ruled that the city must take trash out of Uch-

Dere before the ruined landscape is restored by the end of 2012.

But the [waste](#) trucks just keep rolling in.

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