



Pima County Public Works

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contact: Don Carter - (520) 240-9493
Beth Gorman - (520) 740-3343

Pima County Announces Off-Road Vehicle Responsible Riding Program

Tucson, AZ (May 26, 2004) – The Pima County Departments of Environmental Quality (PDEQ), Transportation and Flood Control District (DOT/FCD), and Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation (PCNRP&R) are kicking off a new program to reduce irresponsible and illegal use of off-road vehicles (ORV). Enforcement actions, including possible fines or impoundments of vehicles, against irresponsible ORV riders will increase beginning June 2004 from Park Police as well as other cooperating police jurisdictions. PCNRP&R operates a 24-hour hotline (877-6061) for the public to call to report illegal or irresponsible ORV use, such as in washes or areas where ‘No Trespassing’ signs are posted. The public may also call PDEQ at 740-3340 to report excessive amounts of airborne dust from ORV use.

The purpose of the ORV Responsible Riding Program is to protect human health and wildlife habitats, and to educate ORV riders. “Riding off designated roads or trails, in wilderness areas, and in or through washes can kill wildlife, damage fragile ecosystems, destroy vegetation, and cause massive soil erosion,” said Don Carter, Park Police for PCNRP&R. Many ORV riders are not aware that riding in a wash is illegal. “Staying on existing roads and trails designated for ORV use, and respecting seasonal closures will help protect wildlife, and the fragile desert in which they live,” he continued.

Riding ORVs too fast, or on soils that are dry or powdery, can raise excessive amounts of dust (particulate matter) in the air we breathe. “Children, the elderly, and people with respiratory or heart disease are most at risk from breathing particulate matter, but healthy people are affected as well,” stated Beth Gorman, Program Manager for PDEQ. “Particulate pollution can cause breathing difficulties, respiratory pain, reduced lung function, heart attacks, and even premature death,” she continued. Particulate matter also reduces visibility, which interferes with beautiful scenic views, and can be hazardous while driving. In addition, spores that cause Valley Fever can become airborne when soil is disturbed.

Another consideration is if left undisturbed, soils naturally bind together forming a crust. This crust resists wind. When the soil’s crust is disturbed by activities such as off-road riding, dust particles can become airborne more easily during wind events. Therefore, wind can pick up dust from disturbed areas long after the ORVs have been riding there, affecting people who are using the roads and trails at future dates.

Help is needed from responsible riders as well as other concerned citizens to assist in identifying areas where illegal ORV use is occurring. Individuals are asked to call 877-6061 to report the Arizona vehicle license plate number if possible, and the date, time, and location the irresponsible or illegal ORV activity was observed, in addition to appropriate identifying features of the offenders. In addition to reporting illegal or irresponsible ORV use, callers can use the hotline to report damage to, or removal of, off-road vehicle signage. The caller is requested to provide the date and location the damage was observed.

Additional information can be obtained by calling Pima County at 740-3345 or by visiting www.deq.pima.gov. Current air quality information can be found at www.AirInfoNow.org.

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