**Don’t be misled by the free shed – EPA warns residents about dirty fill deal**

 **MEDIA RELEASE**

12 February 2020

Residents in the Hills District are being warned to treat any offers of “fill with a free shed” with suspicion after the EPA responded to multiple incidents of property owners being delivered contaminated soil and material by a waste company.

Several residents across the Hawkesbury, the Hills and Hornsby Council areas responded to an ad on Gumtree and accepted the offer of a new, free shed in exchange for receiving tonnes of soil on their property. The delivery business then delivered the soil, flattened it out and built the large shed (large enough to hold equipment like tractors and boats).

However, EPA officers investigating this dodgy delivery company tracked down the fill recipients and tested the soil which showed that many of the delivered loads were contaminated with building and demolition waste, and in some cases even showed up traces of asbestos.

EPA Director Major Compliance and Investigations Greg Sheehy said the free shed was not worth the cost and inconvenience of clean-up.

“The simple message is that if the dirt deal seems too good to be true, then it probably is,” Mr Sheehy said.

“Dodgy waste companies deliver the fill material with promises that it is clean, only for our officers to test it and find that it contains building and demolition waste, heavy metals and even asbestos. In some cases, initial loads looked clean but subsequent loads were a problem.

“Residents need to treat offers of free or cheap fill extremely carefully and treat offers like a free shed with suspicion.

“Our investigations are showing us it’s common for dodgy operators to advertise through classified ad websites, roadside signage, letter box drops or doorknocking directly. Often these people will promise their land fill is ‘guaranteed clean’ or ‘certified’ and will even offer to deliver and level the soil for free. To the untrained eye the soil may seem fine but unfortunately, this is not always the case.”

There are simple steps you can take to ensure you don’t get caught in a scam: check with your local council before accepting fill, use a reputable supplier, ask where the fill has come from, record delivery details, and look out for odd materials in the load.

“Not all operators are dodgy but it is worth taking a minute to consider where the fill you are bringing onto your property is coming from and if you can know for sure that it is clean,” Mr Sheehy said.

“Free fill may come at no price, but it can have a hefty cost if it turns out to be contaminated.”

Find out more about how to ensure you’re protecting your property form dirty fill by visiting <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/litter-and-illegal-dumping/prevent-illegal-dumping/accepting-fill>

NOTE TO EDITORS: Video and social posts available for digital use at <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/litter-and-illegal-dumping/prevent-illegal-dumping/accepting-fill/council-resource-kit>