

Look out, polluters

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In a new way of expressing environmental commitment, the Santa Rosa Police Department now has its own full-time enviro-cop.

While others debate their environmental differences, Detective Mark Mahre will be tracking down the people who everyone agrees are real-life polluters—the individuals and businesses whose negligence or laziness leads them to dump their toxic garbage on the rest of us.

It might be a bad guy who tosses old motor oil in a storm drain or a chemical in a small creek. Mahre is even equipped with three layers of protective gear to search out toxics left in a garbage bin. “Dumpster diving,” as it’s known in the trade.

Santa Rosa’s addition of a full-time investigator for environmental crimes becomes part of a larger effort to crack down on polluters in Sonoma County. In the Sonoma County District Attorney’s Office, for example, deputies Jeffrey Holtzman and Brooke Halsey Jr. spend much of their time prosecuting pollution and poaching cases, respectively.

Through their efforts, the bad guys are punished and others are deterred from becoming polluters.

Once upon a time, communities looked the other way when people dumped their garbage. Now we know how much damage can be done.