

REPORTING RIPARIAN VIOLATIONS ANONYMOUSLY TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Summary

The following procedure outlines how a riparian owner can report riparian violations to a local Roscommon law enforcement agency anonymously, thus avoiding retaliation or reprisals. In most cases the root cause of a reprisal is directly linked to the emotionally charged non-riparian's observation of a law enforcement officer speaking with a riparian, just after the lake front owner asked for assistance in resolving a riparian issue. If you eliminate the observation of the police officer speaking with the riparian, reprisals seldom occur, because the violator does not know who reported the illegal activities. However, it should be considered best practice to provide your name and contact information whenever possible. Filing anonymous complaints often makes it difficult, if not impossible, for criminal action to be taken by a law enforcement officer. This may impede the legal process ultimately resulting in a continuation of the issue. Additionally, an anonymous report may require the officer seek further information by going door to door for answers negating any anonymity and possibly creating issues for neighboring riparian owners.

How To Report A Riparian Violation To Law Enforcement Anonymously

1. If possible, collect information concerning the riparian violation. This might include:
 - A detailed description of the illegal behavior
 - If a car or trailer is involved, a description of the vehicle, license plate number, and location of the vehicle.
 - If a water vessel is involved, a description of the vessel, the MC number, and the location of the vessel.
 - If people are involved in the violation, try to identify the name and local address of the violators.

During this step you do not have to perfect your information, just remember that the more information you give law enforcement, the better. In general, detailed information allows law enforcement to quickly pinpoint and investigate riparian violations. When gathering the information, be careful any action that may violate laws or makes the situation worse such as sparking a confrontation. When there is a life and death emergency or imminent harm to body or property, dial 911. Anyone dialing 911 is not guaranteed anonymity as the 911 system is designed to quickly capture information provided by the phone company. Once the call is placed, this information is sent to 911 and will be recorded when the call is answered at Central Dispatch. All non-emergency calls should be placed to the non-emergency line, 989-275-0911. The non-emergency phone system does not transmit the same information as the emergency phone system making it easier to remain anonymous.

2. Dial 989-275-0911 and report your riparian incident to Roscommon County Central Dispatch. This organization is open 24/7/365, and dispatches public requests for assistance to all police, fire, and EMS agencies in Roscommon County. Central Dispatch efficiently and automatically dispatches support calls to the Michigan State Police, township police, fire departments, marine police, Roscommon County Sheriff department, emergency medical services, etc.

When the 911 Dispatcher answers the phone request to remain anonymous. The 911 Dispatcher will ask you for the nature of your call. Explain you wish to report a riparian violation at Higgins Lake. FYI,

because of computerized links between phone company registration records and law enforcement dispatch systems, your name, phone number, and location address are instantly recorded when you place a call to emergency services organizations. This is true for both land line AND cell phones.

Answer all of the questions asked by the Dispatcher. If asked for your name, address, or phone number, simply state, "I want to remain anonymous."

Make sure you communicate the information you gathered in Step 1.

Note, providing the dispatcher a clear location of the violation is key. The location is entered into the Central Dispatch system in a specific format. The Dispatcher will ask questions to clarify the location if you are not sure. Be patient. Be prepared to furnish her with the name of the street, the nearest cross streets, or a nearby home address for the violation location. This information is REQUIRED, otherwise the responding law enforcement officer cannot start his investigation.

3. The dispatcher will probably ask you, "After this incident is investigated, how should the officer contact you." The riparian has three (3) options, and you need to select one of them:
 - You want the responding law enforcement officer to speak with you in person before leaving the area of the incident. In this case you must give your name and address to central dispatch.
 - You want to remain anonymous, however you want the police officer to call you on the phone, after he investigates the incident. This will result in a private phone call between the riparian and the responding police officer. If you select this option, you must give central dispatch your name and phone number.
 - You want to remain completely anonymous and you do NOT want the responding officer to contact you after he investigates the incident. In most cases, this might be the best way to avoid non-riparian reprisals, but you will not be apprised of the outcome of the investigation. However, since most riparians can observe the law enforcement incident investigation from the comfort and safety of his property, there is no need for further contact with the police.
4. Before ending the call with the central dispatch representative, ask and document the following:
 - "What is the location or address being used in the Central Dispatch system for this complaint?"
 - "Do you know what law enforcement agency will be responding to this complaint?"

Collecting and recording this information is critical for follow-up questions and concerns pertaining to your request for assistance.

5. Sit Back and Chill

The law enforcement agencies which respond to riparian requests for assistance, have to respond to thousands and thousands of calls each year. Rightly so, high priority critical calls are acted on first. At

times, there are too many requests for assistance, so some investigations are delayed. And, during certain times very few professional resources are immediately available to address your concerns. For example, at 4:00 A.M. only a couple of law enforcement officers are typically working, and they have to cover the entire county.

If you followed the above procedure, just chill out. Your request for assistance has been made, recorded, prioritized, communicated to the appropriate law enforcement agency, and will be acted upon. In MOST cases, you should see a law enforcement officer at the riparian location in about 30 minutes. If it is a busy holiday weekend, the response time may be longer. After waiting a reasonable amount of time for assistance, you have the option to place a follow-up call to central dispatch. Make sure you have the address or location used when you place your follow-up call. This allows the Dispatchers to locate your original call.

Historical Overview

In the past, some riparian owners have been harassed, or their property has been vandalized, by suspected non-riparians, after a lake front owner has called a local law enforcement agency for relief of a road-end violation, or other riparian infraction. This sometimes occurs because the non-riparian law violator observed a law enforcement officer walking over to the riparian owner's home, to give the lake front owner an update on the reported incident. Through observation, the non-riparian immediately knew who reported his violation. In some cases, upset non-riparians conclude that the riparian is their enemy and a reprisal occurs sometime in the future.

Documented reprisal damages to riparian property have included the following: Broken windows, vehicles driven through lawns, large quantities of gasoline poured on lawns which killed the grass, sprinkler systems vandalized, homes vandalized, shrubs and flowers cut down or removed, exterior lights broken, exterior keyholes super glued closed, cars "keyed," wood from wood piles stolen, lake side docks and boats vandalized, property (boat safety equipment, lawn chairs, exterior tables, etc.) stolen, and dead fish/animals placed inside covered boats and doorways. These damages tend to occur in the dead of night, or when the riparian is away from his property.

Documented emotional and personal conflicts such as the following between riparian and non-riparians have also occurred: Yelling matches, pushing and shoving, finger jesters, excessive noise ordinance violations, prank phone calls, fist fights, assaults, and the generation of false police reports and eye-witness accounts on the part of non-riparians.

Note: All suspected and observed reprisal damages and behavior should be reported to local law enforcement. Call 911 if there is an active-immediate threat or 989-275-0911 to request an officer when there is no immediate threat and it must be investigated by law enforcement. Keep a record of each complaint for future reference, and legal purposes if necessary.

Information Sources

1. Personal observations and actions on the part of riparians and non-riparians
2. Information obtained from Vance J. Stringham, Roscommon E911 Director of Central Dispatch, 500 Lake Street, Roscommon, MI 48653-7690
3. Conversations with various Roscommon Sheriff Department law enforcement officers.