

# What Can We Do About Dirt Roads and Dust?



## Dust on Dirt Roads

Dirt roads pose one of the most difficult challenges regarding airborne dust control in Pima County. Pima County Departments of Environmental Quality and Transportation are working together to provide information to the public on possible alternatives to combat this serious issue.

## All Dirt Roads Are Not Created Equal

Whether it is high traffic on old roads, additional traffic in new developments, or alleyways in the center of town, vehicular traffic on dirt roads causes dust to become airborne and contributes to road erosion problems. While some residents seek to pave the dirt roads they live on, other neighbors enjoy them for the country atmosphere, and resist paving. Even if all residents in a neighborhood agree to improve their dirt road, how and when they can treat it depends on several factors including soil conditions and base, adequate roadside drainage, number of vehicles using the road, scheduling, and, of course, cost.

## What Can Be Done to Reduce Airborne Dust on Dirt Roads?

- Reduce speed limits by posting signs, curving roads, and/or installing speed humps
- Eliminate heavy vehicle traffic by relocating mail boxes, garbage collection, and school bus stops to paved roads, or to the beginning of the dirt road
- Close roads to thru traffic
- Water when necessary
- Grade regularly
- Use an environmentally-friendly dust palliative that can withstand routine traffic
- Pave, chipseal, or use gravel

Choose your solutions wisely! You are liable for whatever actions you take on the road.

## Airborne Dust is Particulate Matter Pollution

Particulate Matter (PM) is simply airborne dust, and consists of microscopic solid particles that become airborne from many types of sources, including dirt roads. Pima Association of Governments states that about 50% of PM in our community comes from using motor vehicles – exhaust, brake and tire wear, paved road dust, and unpaved road dust.

PM is harmful to human health and contributes to, among other things, difficulty breathing, heart attacks, and even premature death. Airborne dust affects all individuals, especially children, the elderly, and people with existing heart and respiratory disease. It is also a public nuisance which can damage property and reduce quality of life. PM can reduce visibility, interfering with beautiful scenic views, and can create a hazard while driving. It is a federally regulated pollutant that must be minimized.

## For More Information.....

### Airborne Dust and Dust Complaints:

Pima County Dept. of Environmental Quality  
33 N. Stone Ave., Ste. 700 • Tucson, AZ 85701

520.724.7400

[www.pima.gov/deq](http://www.pima.gov/deq) • [www.AirInfoNow.org](http://www.AirInfoNow.org)

### Pima County Dirt Roads: Pima County Dept. of Transportation

201 N. Stone • Tucson, AZ 85701

520.724.6410

[www.dot.pima.gov](http://www.dot.pima.gov)

### Dirt Road Improvements:

Pima County Development Services  
201 N. Stone • Tucson, AZ 85701

520.724.6490

[www.dot.pima.gov](http://www.dot.pima.gov)

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **How do I know if my road is private or public?**

To find out if your dirt road is privately-owned, county-owned, and/or county-owned and maintained, contact Pima County Department of Transportation (PCDOT), Mapping and Records in the Public Works Building at 201 N. Stone Ave., 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Or call them at 724-6332. You can also go on-line and search on MapGuide at [www.dot.pima.gov/gis/maps/mapguide/](http://www.dot.pima.gov/gis/maps/mapguide/).

## **How do I get my public road graded?**

PCDOT operates a six- to eight-week grading cycle on county-maintained dirt roads. You can submit a request for grading at PCDOT Operations and Maintenance at 724-2639.

## **Why don't my property taxes pay for road maintenance?**

Property taxes are applied to the general fund and toward specific items such as public safety (sheriff), health, schools, libraries, and other community services, and do *not* contribute funding for road maintenance. Pima County uses Highway User Revenue Fees (HURF) for road maintenance on public roads. HURF money comes from users of Arizona highways via fuel taxes, registration fees, motor carrier fees, etc. Revenues generated from this fund are dependent on fuel consumption. With conscious efforts to conserve energy, and as more fuel efficient vehicles consume less fuel, the prospects are a decrease in revenues from HURF funds. While there is not enough HURF money to create or improve roads that are not currently in the maintenance system, PCDOT does continue to maintain the roads that are in the system.

In addition, it is not appropriate to spend public money on private property/roads. Therefore, the cost to maintain or improve private dirt roads is the responsibility of the road owners.

## **What do I have to do to get the "okay" for me to improve a private road?**

For any improvement activity on private roads such as paving, contact Pima County Development Services to get proper permits or make sure there are not any specific regulations on the scope of work, for instance clearing native vegetation or hillside locations. Contact them at 201 N Stone, 724-6490, or [www.pimaxpress.com/](http://www.pimaxpress.com/).

## **Can we maintain a county-owned but not county-maintained dirt road?**

For any improvement activity on public roads, contact PCDOT for review and permit coordination to make sure that the work plan is within regulations.

## **Can I give my private road to Pima County so they will maintain it?**

In order for private roads to become county-maintained, two requirements must be met.

1. Roadway property must be appropriate to road use. For example, 50 to 60 feet of right-of-way width may be required for local residential roads. Main collector roads may require up to 150 feet of dedicated right-of-way. These widths are necessary to provide proper maintenance and to appropriately prepare for future needs of the community. Property owners adjacent to the road must dedicate the necessary right-of-way at no cost to Pima County.
2. The road must be constructed conforming to subdivision standards at no cost to the County. All road requests are evaluated according to road condition. Current minimum standards for a local road are basically a 24-foot wide surfaced strip with 8-foot shoulders, adequate roadside drainage, and a thickness of base determined for soil conditions by PCDOT.

Once these conditions have been met and approved, Pima County and the Board of Supervisors will proceed to establish the road and include it in the Pima County Maintenance System. You may call PCDOT at 724-6410 if you have questions or concerns regarding this issue.