



**How - and why -
to report
environmental
damage**





How (and why) to report environmental damage

NOTE: Please consider storing this PDF on your phone for quick and easy reference.

Costa Rica has many excellent environmental laws but unfortunately it does not have the resources to effectively enforce those laws. That is where we, concerned citizens, can help. There are several ways we can report our concerns about environmental damage to the proper authorities.

There are many actions that are either always illegal, or that require a permit. These include cutting trees, moving earth, setting fires, putting poison in the rivers, and more. When we see such things we have the legal right to report our concerns to the proper authorities.

Before we describe how to file such a report (called a “denuncia”), it is important to note that filing a “denuncia” is not an accusation of wrong doing. It is possible that what you are seeing (for example, felled trees or earth movement) has been legally authorized and that the workers/ owners have a legal permit. However, it is also possible that the environmental damage you are seeing is illegal. And it is also possible that the workers have a permit but that it is not the correct one; at least one of our legal actions addresses this kind of situation.

It is not your responsibility to determine whether the actions you see are legal or illegal. It is your right - everyone’s right in Costa Rica - to file a denuncia if you see something that concerns you. The denuncia is your way of saying: “I see something that concerns me. I don’t know if it is legal or illegal, but I am asking the proper authorities to check it out.” So, don’t be concerned that filing a denuncia is accusing anyone of anything, because it is not.

The best policy is: **If you see something, say something by filing a denuncia!**

BEST PRACTICES FOR COLLECTING EVIDENCE:

Ideally you would take pictures and video to document the scene (details below). However, it is not required that you do so. If you are unable to photo document the site, or feel unsafe doing so, please be sure to file a denuncia anyway.

Please note that not all methods of filing a denuncia provide a way to upload photos or video. However, your photos and videos may still be useful if there is an investigation of the incident. If you feel safe and are able to document the site, please try to follow these guidelines:

- Videos and pictures can be instrumental in drawing attention to violations. Often those in the community are better positioned to collect evidence of illegal actions than the professional investigators. This is because the authorities often arrive after-the-fact when the damage is already done or the evidence has been removed or is gone.
- Ensure your camera or cell phone is set to the correct date, time, and GPS locations so the digital metadata is recorded.
- Record your voice saying the date, time, and location.
- If you need to film anonymously, write the time, date and location on a piece of paper and hold it up in front of the camera for 10 seconds.
- Film strategically! Ask yourself, “If I give this footage to someone not familiar with this location, could they summarize what happened and draw an accurate map of the scene based only on the information in my video or pictures?” You want them to be able to answer, “YES!”
- Often the WHAT is filmed, but not the WHO and the HOW.
- It is best to film the entire location continuously, but if the area is too large, complex or dangerous to do so, you can start each new clip or picture by overlapping with the previous one.
- Drop a [location pin](#) in Google Maps so that you have accurate coordinates to share with the authorities (and with Osa Vive) for where the action is taking place.
- Be sure to collect the following:
 - * A very slow 360-degree pan to provide context and show what is happening behind the scene.
 - * Wide-angle shots to provide context and to identify location
 - * Medium and close-up shots to identify what is taking place
 - * If possible, film each of the shots listed above for 10 seconds or more. Move the camera slowly when you change your position or when you zoom in or out.
 - * Take pictures from different angles to make it easier for officials to identify the location. Include identifying features in the images. If trees are being cut down, it's important to have imagery that shows a wider area so that locations can be identified later.

If you were unable to add basic information to the video recording itself, then create a separate document that summarizes the key information about your visual evidence. Be sure to do this while the details are fresh in your mind.

Always include:

- Date and time you wrote the summary
- Date, time and location of the filming
- Names and contact information for the person filming, as well as other people on scene who may have information about the events that took place. (If people wish to remain anonymous, this is okay too.)
- A short, factual summary of what is shown in the video. Leave out unsupported opinions, misinformation and exaggerations.

Now that you have documented the scene here's what you do with that information!

There are four ways to file a denuncia. Select one or more that you prefer.

1. Call 911

This can be done in English or Spanish. There is no way to upload photos or video.

This may seem like a surprising option if you are from a country that uses the 911 system for emergencies. However, in Costa Rica 911 operators are trained to take environmental denuncias - it is a normal part of their job here.

We recommend calling 911 for several reasons:

- They are on-call 24/7
- There are always bilingual operators
- Each call goes into a system that requires a resolution for each call
- Each call becomes part of the official statistics and is used to allocate future resources to various parts of the country.
- 911 operators will call the nearest authority to check out your complaint, so don't feel like you are wasting time by calling 911 - they will contact the closest proper authorities quickly.

(For these same reasons, we recommend to always call 911 in Costa Rica for health or safety emergencies as well, even if you know the number of your local police.)

Your call will be answered by a recorded message in Spanish. Hit any key on your keypad to continue. The operator who answers will probably speak Spanish, so feel free to ask for an English-speaking operator by saying "Ingles, por favor." The 911 operator will ask you for:

1. The location of the problem. In the Costa Ballena, that will be **Puntarenas Province, Osa Canton, and probably Distrito Puerto Cortes or Distrito Bahia Ballena.** But be as specific as you can and be sure to name the nearest town. If the authorities can't find the location, they can't evaluate your denuncia.

2. Type of infraction. For example, tree cutting, burning, poisoning, hunting, etc. Try to describe what you saw/are seeing as carefully as possible. The more detail, the better.

3. Your name, phone number and e-mail. After that information has been collected, the operator should ask if you want to remain anonymous, and that's up to you. If they don't ask but you do want to be anonymous, then just let them know you'd like to remain anonymous.

Be sure to ask for a Report Number. You can call 911 later to find out how your case was resolved.

2. Call 1192

This can only be done in Spanish. Photos and video can be uploaded after you get a case number.

The 1192 system is part of SITADA, which is an agency within MINAE, Costa Rica's environmental agency.

The procedure is similar to calling 911. The operator will ask you for:

1. The location of the problem. In the Costa Ballena, that will be **Puntarenas Province, Osa Canton, either Distrito Puerto Cortes or Distrito Bahia Ballena**
2. Type of infraction. For example, tree cutting, burning, poisoning, hunting, etc Try to describe what you saw/are seeing as carefully as possible. The more detail, the better.
3. Your name, phone number and e-mail. After that information has been collected, the operator should ask if you want to remain anonymous, and that's up to you. If they don't ask and you do want to be anonymous, then just let them know you'd like to remain anonymous.

At the end of the call they will give you a report number that you can follow up using the SITADA website described below. You can also use that website to upload photos/videos to your file later.

3. Online with SITADA (an agency within MINAE, the Environmental Agency of Costa Rica)

Photos and videos can be uploaded. This option is for Spanish speakers, but if you are an English speaker using Chrome and want to file this way you can translate the page to English. To translate in Chrome, look at the far right of the window with the website URL and click on the icon that looks like a very small G/T (for "Google Translate"), just left of the star.

Go to: https://www.sitada.go.cr/denunciaspublico/ingreso_denuncias.aspx



If you want to translate the page to English be sure to click on this G/T icon before you do anything else. After you click on it the rest of the document will be translated to English.

The home page looks like this:

Register of environmental complaints

INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR ATTENTION AND PROCESSING OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLAINTS, WE INFORM YOU THAT IF YOU REQUIRE ADVICE TO FILE OR FILE YOUR COMPLAINT YOU CAN CALL 1192 FOR SUPPORT OR TO MAKE YOUR COMPLAINT WITH THE SUPPORT OF OUR SERVICE PLATFORM.

Complaint Type: Agua

Type of Violation: Aprovechamiento ilegal del agua

Affected Location: [Text Field]

Reported Entity: [Text Field]

Violation Address: [Text Field]

Do not enter information about the accused (names, identification), this information must be entered in the 'Reported Entity' section or as an attachment in the 'Attach files' space.

Violation Description: [Text Area]

Attach files: [Text Field] Look for Remove

[+] Delete File

For each window, select an option from their pull down menu or type in information, as appropriate.

The first window asks for the **Complaint Type**, the type of denuncia. Pick from the list - maybe “Forestal” if tree cutting, or “Water” if you saw a creek being filled with loose dirt.

The second window asks for **Type of Violation** which is more specific. So, for example, if you picked “Forestal” for the first window, you might next pick “Felling trees” or “Tree poisoning.”

Complaint Type: Forestal

Type of Violation: Tala y/o aprovechamiento

Affected Location: [Text Field]

Reported Entity: [Text Field]

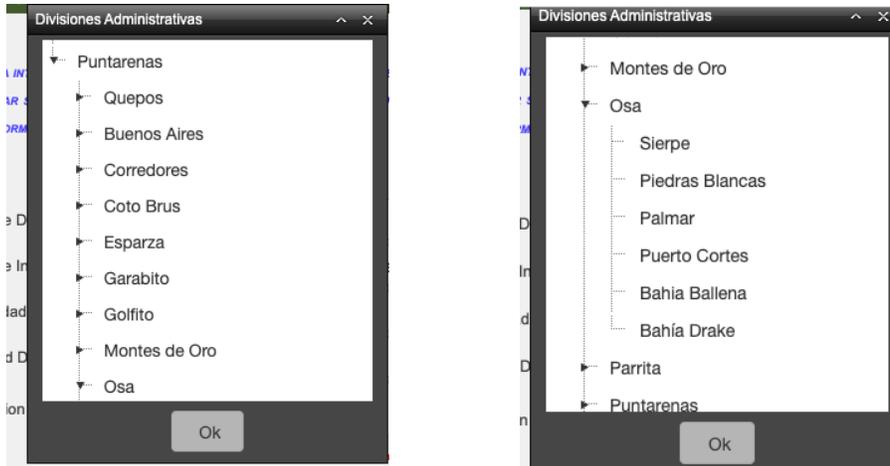
Violation Address: [Text Field]

Violation Description: [Text Area]

Felling and/or exploitation

- Forest fire
- Invasion of Area Protection of river/body of water
- Protected Wild Area Invasion
- wood transport
- Acquisition and sawing of trees
- Tree girdling
- Area Invasion Protection of Nascent
- Invasion of Aquifer Recharge Area
- Socola/forest strata
- Wood sale
- Tree poisoning

The third window asks for the district (Distrito) of the **Affected Location**. Click on the magnifying glass at right; a list of all the provinces will appear. In the Costa Ballena (Domi to Ojochal), select your location by clicking on the little black pointer indicating “Puntarenas” then select “Osa” and then either “Puerto Cortes” or “Bahia Ballena.” Then click “OK.”

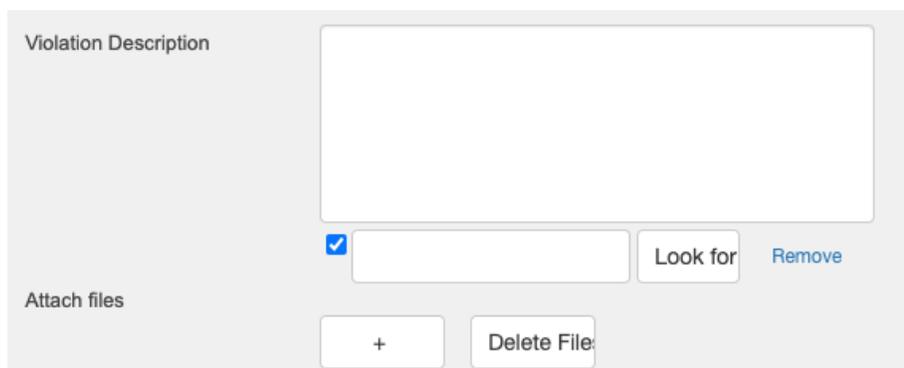


The fourth window asks for the **Reported Entity**. If you know the name of a person or company, enter that information. If not, leave it blank.

The fifth window asks for **Violation Address**, the exact location of the infraction. If you have GPS coordinates you can enter those. You can also write out the most accurate location description you can, including distances and landmarks.

The sixth window asks for the **Violation Description**. Here you describe what you saw/are seeing to the best of your ability. Be as specific as you can: “I saw 8 large trees cut down” is better than “they were cutting some trees.”

If you want to upload images, look under the description you just wrote and: 1) Click on the little box at left, and 2) click on “Look For” so you can find and select the file you want to upload.



If you want to add more than one file, click on the “+” sign next to “**Attach files**” and you can add additional files.

Finally, there is a box that asks for basic information about you:

Complainant's Name

No. Identification

Phone

Address

Email

Confidential Personal Data

IF YOU REQUIRE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION TO BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL, SELECT THE CONFIDENTIAL PERSONAL INFORMATION BOX

Report

Fill out the personal information. At the bottom there is a check box where you can ask to keep your personal information confidential. This allows you to make your report anonymously, if you wish.

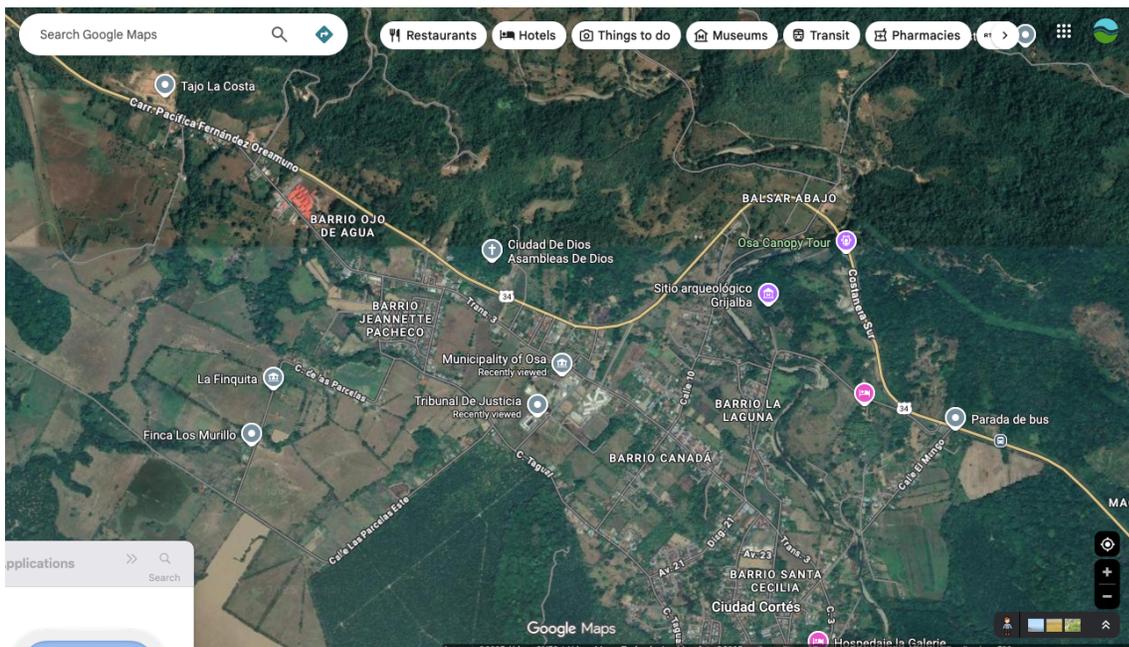
Finally, click on **Report** to submit the completed denuncia.

After you file the report you will be sent a report number that you can use to follow up later at that same web page and see the result of your report.

4. In person in Puerto Cortes

This can be only be in Spanish. Photos and video can be included.

You can make a report at the Tribunal Justicia in Puerto Cortes, just behind the Municipality.



You'll want to visit the first office on your left labelled Fiscal/Fiscalia, which is the Spanish word for Prosecutor. This is the office of the Environmental Prosecutor.

Be sure to have the same kind of information you would include for any other kind of environmental report:

- pictures or videos
- exact location (GPS coordinates and/or exact directions including nearest town)
- careful description of what you saw - be as precise as possible.
 - For example: Cutting 12 trees, or putting two dump trucks full of earth into a creek, etc...
- the date and time of your observations
- your name, phone number, e-mail
- If you wish, you can ask to remain anonymous

Thank you for caring and taking the time to express your concern to the proper authorities.

***Remember:
If you see something,
say something by filing a denuncia!***



Please join us and support this important work.

