



## Our Litter Problem

### Is litter really a big problem?

Unfortunately, yes. Keep America Beautiful has over 600 certified affiliates, (KTBB being one of them) across the country who know first-hand just how bad litter can be, and how pervasive. They also know that litter typically impacts all areas of a town. Here are some facts

- Litter invites more litter. Once litter has accumulated along a road or in a community, people are more likely to keep littering.
- Over 51 billion pieces of litter land on U.S. roadways each year. Most of it, 46.6 billion pieces, is less than four inches, according to KAB's National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study. That's 6,729 items per mile.
- Litter cleanup costs the U.S. almost \$11.5 billion each year, with businesses paying \$9.1 billion. Governments, schools, and other organizations pick up the remainder.
- Community economy and quality of life suffer. The presence of litter in a community takes a toll on quality of life, property values, and housing prices. The KAB 2009 National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study found that litter in a community decreases property values 7 percent.
- Litter has environmental consequences. Wind and weather, traffic, and animals move litter into gutters, lawns and landscaped areas, alleyways, and parking structures. Debris may be carried by storm drains into local waterways, with potential for serious environmental contamination.
- The types of litter found most often include bottles, cans and fast food packaging, plastic shopping bags and cigarette butts.
  - Eighty percent of our waterways are littered with trash that was dropped on land.
- Litter is not only morally wrong; it's illegal in all 50 states. While every state may vary, punishment can include a fine as well as ***jail time*** for littering and illegal dumping.
  - For more facts about litter, check out the KAB website. [Link www.KAB.org](http://www.KAB.org).

### Who litters?

Unfortunately many people litter. And they may be members of your family, your friends... even you. Research shows that individuals under 30 are more likely to litter than those who are older. In fact, age, and not gender, is a significant predictor of littering behavior.

This campaign is meant to shine a light on the act of littering and to help us all see that it's an unaccepted and wrong behavior, just like buying sushi at a gas station. Gross!

### Why do people litter?

That's a complicated question with no easy answer. Our research shows that people often litter because they have no sense of ownership, even though parks and waterfronts are really owned by us all.

Another common reason for littering is the belief that “someone else will pick it up for me.” Some REAL jerks even use the excuse that they’re creating jobs for people who clean up. Well, that couldn’t be farther from the truth. Those “cleaner-uppers” are often paid for by your tax dollars or the extra money you pay for products and services at local businesses.

Most of the time litter invites more litter. Once litter has accumulated along a road or in a community, people are more likely to keep littering in that location. Sometimes it’s simply a matter of laziness. If there is no garbage or recycling container nearby, some people will just throw their garbage in a spot that is convenient to them (which can be anywhere from a parking lot to a public park). In other cases, people don’t want to cross a street or walk a few feet to where a garbage receptacle is located.

Also, sometimes people litter and don’t realize it. Unintentional litter, such as litter that flies out of the window of your car, from an uncovered container, or the back of a pick-up truck, *is still litter*.

### *If some of the littering is unintentional, what's the big deal?*

Because unintentionally littering is still littering and it actually contributes to a large portion of the litter found across the country. So take a few extra moments to secure your garbage to keep it from becoming litter.

I throw my banana peel out my car window sometimes. It's “biodegradable” or “organic” so that's not littering, right?

WRONG! Think about it – would you want someone throwing stuff in YOUR yard, biodegradable or not?

Littering is putting an item where it does not belong, like the ground. So, unless you’re driving through a banana farm, that peel is litter. Organic or not, it is still an eyesore and leads to more litter. And it can also attract bugs and other hungry animals, generate odors and it doesn’t actually decompose quickly.

### What can I do to stop litter?

So glad you asked! Here are a few ideas:

- First, don’t litter. Set a good example for your friends, kids and neighbors. Even an apple core is considered litter.
- *Never* throw trash out of your car window. Also, be aware when driving with your windows open. Loose items like paper or candy wrappers can fly out easily.
  - Place a bag in your car to collect personal trash (or recyclables) instead of tossing them.
- At home, secure the lids on your trash and recycling containers, especially when you set them out on collection day.
- When recycling at the curb, secure or bundle loose papers and other light objects tightly so they won’t get carried away with the wind.
- Secure loads and remove trash from the back of your pickup truck. Even larger items can fly out when you are traveling at high speeds. This is also very dangerous.
- If you smoke, *never* throw your cigarette butts on the ground. Cigarette butts, while small, actually constitute a large part of existing litter.
- If you see litter, pick it up. Even if it’s one chip bag or straw wrapper – that’s one less piece of litter on the street.
- Get involved in a community clean up . Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful, the local KAB affiliate organizes regular clean-up programs. It’s an easy way to see the problem first-hand *and* to do something about it. Give us a call and we can help you to join a mission that matters!.