LITTER REMAINS A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM.

While litter and littering have decreased, they continue to have a significant impact on our communities and environment.

- Over 51 billion pieces of litter appear on U.S. roadways each year. Most of it, 46.6 billion pieces (91%), is less than four inches. That’s **6,729 items per mile** of roadway.

- Tobacco products comprise roughly 38% of all U.S. roadway litter. Paper (22%) and plastic (19%) are the next largest types of materials.

- Packaging litter comprises nearly 46% of litter 4 inches and greater. This includes fast food, snack, tobacco, and other product packaging.

- Most roadway litter—76%—appears to originate from motorists and pedestrians. Individual actions by motorists (52%), pedestrians (22.8%), improperly covered trucks and cargo loads (16.4%), and other behaviors are the source of roadway litter.

- Most non-roadway litter is found at “transition points.” These are at or near entrances to movie theaters, retail, bus stops, and other places where anyone consuming a food or tobacco product is required to discard the item before entering.
Litter in America: Results from the nation’s largest litter study


THE COST OF LITTER IS SUBSTANTIAL

Litter clean up costs the U.S. more than $11.5 billion each year, with businesses paying $9.1 billion. Local and state governments, schools, and other organizations pick up the remaining costs.

The indirect costs of litter are also considerable.

- The presence of litter in a community decreases property values by 7%.
- Of homeowners surveyed, 40% believe that litter reduces home values by 10% to 24%.
- 55% of realtors think that litter reduces property values by about 9%.
- 60% of property appraisers would reduce a home’s value if it was littered.

WHAT’S CHANGED IN 40 YEARS?

A comparative analysis of the 2009 research and KAB’s national litter study conducted in 1969 found that successful education, ongoing clean-up efforts, and changes in packaging are having an impact:

- Visible litter on our nation’s roadways has decreased approximately 61% in the past 40 years.
- Paper, metal, glass, and beverage container litter has decreased by 74.4% since the 1969 national study.
- The incidence of plastic items in the litter stream has increased over 165%. This reflects a 340% per capita increase in use of plastic packaging over the past 40 years.

Litter has environmental consequences. Wind and weather, traffic, and animals move litter into gutters, lawns and landscaped areas, alleyways, and parking structures. Litter near storm drains and beach debris are also likely to wash into local waterways, with potential for serious environmental contamination.