

# Campaign Key Messages



**We all have a part to play in keeping Washington clean and litter free.** Roadside litter impacts road safety, our environment and the wellbeing of our communities. Preventing litter starts with everyday choices.

- The [2022 Washington State Litter Study](#) estimates that:
  - Nearly 38 million pounds of litter accumulates annually on Washington roads, on-off ramps and public areas. That's nearly 5 pounds (or 897 pieces) of litter per person every year.
  - More than 26 million pounds (13,096 tons) of material is littered along Washington roads every year. This is the same weight as 873 public transit buses!
  - Washington roadways have 42% more pieces of litter than the national average.
    - According to the Keep America Beautiful [National Litter Study](#), the national average is 5,714 pieces per mile. Washington's average is 8,112 pieces per mile.
- Washington state's departments of Transportation and Ecology together spend millions annually on litter cleanup efforts. In 2025, together they spent over \$17 million per year. Yet they can still only pick up a small fraction of what ends up on the ground. That's why preventing litter before it hits the ground is essential. Small every day choices can reduce cleanup costs and protect our communities.
- Food packaging, plastic wrappers and bags, beverage containers, cigarette butts and other common litter items are not biodegradable and can leach harmful chemicals into our environment.
- Litter has a negative impact on wildlife, waterways, public health, safety, and the economy.
- Litter is big problem, but doing your part is simple. Using a litter bag in your vehicle, holding on to trash until you reach a bin, properly securing cargo and cleaning out truck beds all help prevent litter. Even when no one else is around, those small decisions matter.
- Your small daily actions make a big difference.
- Be part of the solution and join the more than 75% of Washingtonians who never litter.
- Preventing litter from ending up on the ground is by far more effective, and cheaper, than paying crews or arranging for volunteers to pick it up.

## Calls to Action

Preventing litter starts with everyday choices, often made in small moments when no one else is watching.

- **Keep a litter bag in your car.** Use a litter bag while traveling to keep your vehicle tidy and reduce the chances of littering accidentally when you open a door or window. When visiting parks and other recreation areas, bring a bag with you so it's easy to pack out what you packed in.
- **Hold on to trash from your travels until you reach your destination or a waste receptacle at a stop along the way.** It may not seem like a big deal to toss the occasional bag or bottle on the ground, but those decisions add up to millions of pounds of litter (and millions of dollars of clean up) every year in Washington.
- **Live litter free and help others do the same.** Talk with your friends and family about simple ways to prevent litter and help them make better choices. When we all look out for each other, it makes a big difference for our state.

## Quick Facts

- More than 75% of Washington residents don't litter.
- In 2022, Ecology completed a [statewide litter composition and generation study](#) to compare with previous state and national studies. This was the first litter study in Washington in nearly 20 years. Initial findings include:
  - There is 38 million pounds of litter on our roadways and in our public areas every year. That's nearly 5 pounds of litter per person living in Washington.
  - More than 26 million pounds (13,096 tons) of waste is littered along Washington roads every year.
  - 73,580 pieces of litter (1,579 pounds) per mile per year on Washington's interstate highways. Local roads have the least amount of litter and still show 18,051 pieces of litter (143 pounds) per mile per year.
  - On-off ramps are a new hot spot for litter. They have 151,017 pieces of litter (713 pounds) per acre per year, which is 7 times higher than measured in the 2004 litter study.
  - Public areas, like rest areas, parks and recreation areas, see 11.6 million pounds of litter (5,801 tons) per year.
  - Cigarette butts are the number one most littered item (by piece) along Washington roads and they accumulate at an average rate of 8,788 butts per mile across all roadway types combined.
  - Cigarette butts, plastic film, food wrappers, snack bags, construction and demolition debris, tires, cardboard boxes, and glass beer bottles are some of the most commonly littered items.
- According to 2021 research commissioned by Ecology, about 26% of litterers say they would be motivated to stop if "a friend, family member, or passenger asked me to refrain." People also identified not having a car trash bag as the top reason that they litter.
- Unsecured loads cause around 300 crashes and multiple fatalities a year in Washington and contribute to more than 40% of roadside litter.
- In 2024, Ecology's litter crews, WSDOT's maintenance crews and Adopt-a-Highway volunteers, Department of Corrections crews, and local governments cleaned up more than 6.2 million pounds of litter across the state. Despite this major effort, this is only a fraction of what accumulates throughout the year.

## Litter fines and citations

- Littering and illegal dumping are against the law in Washington. Fines range from \$103 to \$5,000. Many cities and counties have local ordinances that are stricter than the state law.
- WSDOT and Ecology do not have legal enforcement authority for litter or secure your load violations – that rests with the Washington State Patrol, local police departments, sheriff's offices, and health departments.
- Washington's [RCW 70A.200.060](#) sets minimum fines for littering and illegal dumping.

- Throwing or depositing litter on the highway = \$231
- Littering less than 1 cubic foot = \$103
- Litter more than 1 cubic foot, but less than 1 cubic yard = \$500
- Littering more than 1 cubic yard = \$1,000 - \$5,000 and potential jail time
- Potentially dangerous litter (including cigarette butts) = \$1,025
- Under state law, litter tickets and fines require the violation being witnessed by law enforcement. Citations cannot be issued based on reports alone.

## **WSDOT's Adopt-a-Highway program**

WSDOT's Adopt-a-Highway program is a valuable tool aimed at keeping the state's roadways clean and safe for residents and motorists. The Adopt-A-Highway program is comprised of a volunteer pickup program and a commercial sponsorship program. Details on both program options are found on the [Adopt-a-Highway webpage](#).

## **Partner Turnkey Copy for Website and Newsletter Use**

### **We Keep WA Litter Free**

Even though 75% of Washington residents never litter, Ecology's 2022 Litter Study shows more than 26 million pounds (13,096 tons) of waste accumulates along Washington roads every year and another 11.6 million pounds (5,801 tons) accumulates in our public areas across the state.

Despite Washington spending millions annually on cleanup efforts, only a small fraction gets picked up. Millions of pounds of litter are left behind, negatively impacting our environment, wildlife, waterways, public health, safety and economy.

Litter is a big problem, but preventing it is simple. Using a litter bag in your vehicle, holding trash until you reach a bin at your destination or a stop along the way and properly securing your cargo all help keep litter from hitting the ground. When everyone does their part, small daily choices add up to a cleaner Washington.