

***DON'T TRASH ARIZONA* LITTER PREVENTION & EDUCATION PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

What is *Don't Trash Arizona*?

- *Don't Trash Arizona* is a litter prevention and education program to reduce litter on our state and regional highways. It is a joint effort between the Maricopa Association of Governments and the Arizona Department of Transportation to increase public awareness of litter and address the problem. We hope to reach our goal of reducing litter through a three stage process: 1. Increasing awareness. 2. Changing attitudes. 3. Using those changed attitudes to change littering behavior.

When was the program started?

- The program was implemented in 2006, but it really originated during the development of a Regional Transportation Plan that was developed by MAG and which was funded by voters as part of Proposition 400 in 2004.
- At the very first meeting of the Transportation Policy Committee, which helped develop the Plan, local elected officials brought up concerns about freeway litter. This concern led elected officials to include \$279 million for landscape maintenance and litter control in the Regional Transportation Plan, which included funding not only for sweeping and pickup but also for prevention & education.
- There are more than 6,000 miles of freeways in Arizona that handle a statewide population of more than 6 million people – 3.7 of which are here in Maricopa County. Since 2000, the number of lane miles on the regional freeway system has nearly doubled, with more than 350 lane miles added to the freeway maintenance program. This exponential growth has made keeping pace with litter pickup very difficult.

Note: ADOT is currently using four types of litter abatement along interstates and highways:

- ❖ Adopt-a-Highway volunteers
- ❖ Adopt-a-Highway corporate sponsors
- ❖ Inmate labor
- ❖ On-call maintenance contractors

There are four major components to these efforts:

- ❖ Regularly scheduled litter pickup
- ❖ More frequent or one-time pickups at hot spots
- ❖ Sweeping lanes and ramps
- ❖ Litter prevention and education programs

How big of a problem is freeway littering in Arizona?

- Certainly it is a significant problem. Currently, crews remove about 500 bags of litter every weekday from Valley freeways. That equates to about 1.6 MILLION pounds of trash every year. The way we describe it when we go out to elementary schools is that is the equivalent of *803 elephants* worth of trash!
- The good news is we are making some progress -- thanks to the increased funding that has allowed ADOT to increase the number of litter pickup crews (from 4 to 18), and, thanks in part we hope, to increased awareness through *Don't Trash Arizona*. When MAG & ADOT first began the campaign in 2006, a statewide survey found that about 80 percent of residents statewide saw litter as a big or moderate problem. We repeated that survey in August and found that number was down to 74 percent, so we do believe we are on the right track in addressing the litter problem. (There was an even greater decline among residents in Maricopa County who see it as a problem – 74 percent in 2006 and 66 percent in 2008).

What are the costs of littering?

- This is an extremely important question, because there are not only economic costs but environmental and health costs as well.
- From an economic standpoint, it costs our region more than \$3 million dollars and 150,000 labor hours to pick up litter along Valley freeways. Litter also impacts our economy when tourists and prospective businesses choose not to come back to our state due to a poor impression – which is definitely not something the Valley can afford right now.
- Litter is not only ugly, it is unsanitary and can cause environmental and health problems. Cigarette butts, for example, along with plastics and other types of litter, contain toxic chemicals that can end up in storm drains and contaminate our water systems.
- Another safety impact comes from trash and other debris that falls from vehicles due to unsecured loads. Road debris on roadways nationwide causes 25,000 accidents and more than 80 fatalities each year—and really we believe this number may be significantly higher because not all debris-related accidents may be reported as such. We have a gentleman here in the Valley who works with us on this issue, Paul Reif, who tragically lost his 29-year old son to road debris, so it can have tragic consequences.
- Roadway debris also costs us in productivity due to accidents and slowdowns that increase the time we spend in traffic.
- So the costs are high. Litter is ugly, its unhealthy and its unsafe.

How much of littering is “accidental,” when items blow out of or fall from vehicles, and how does this contribute to the litter problem?

- We have found that while 60 percent of littering is deliberate, 40 percent is caused by what you might call accidental littering. Here in Arizona, about one in 6 residents drive a pickup truck, and pickup drivers are significantly more likely than others to notice trash falling out of their vehicles. In our survey, 36 percent of pickup owners said they had trash blow out of the beds of their pickup in the past 3 months. One elected official jokingly called this the “magic” pickup syndrome – when you start your trip you’ve got all this trash in the bed, when you get to your destination it has magically disappeared, but of course it’s not magic, it’s on our freeways. And why we may call this type of litter “accidental” it is just as preventable.

Why do people litter?

- Our research shows that littering is a complex behavior that can be attributed to a variety of factors. People are lazy, it’s easy to do, people believe one small piece of trash won’t matter, and they don’t believe they’ll get caught. Research conducted nationwide by Keep America Beautiful found that 75 percent of Americans admitted to littering over the past 5 years.

What are some of the common characteristics of the type of people who litter?

- We do find that the most common litterers are males aged 18 to 34. Other common litterbugs include smokers, those who eat out twice a week, those who frequent bars and night clubs and those who drive pickup trucks.
- Because littering is not a consistent behavior, it can make it tough to target litter messages.

What are some of the most commonly littered items?

- According to our research, soda & beer cans top the list of the most severe litter problem, followed by water bottles, plastic items & cigarette butts. Paper, food wrappers and tires were also mentioned by 1 in 6 residents as being a major problem. But it’s also little bits of paper such as grocery receipts, gum wrappers, and straw wrappers that accumulate in cars that also end up on freeways. A lot of people think, oh a gum wrapper, it’s so small it won’t matter. But if all 3.7 million residents think the same way, you can see it’s a problem.
- We did recently conduct focus groups of men in the target demographic of 18-24, and they had any number of reasons for littering, ranging from they didn’t like a messy car, they wanted to get rid of beer cans so they wouldn’t be in the car if they were stopped by police, and that there was no ashtray in their car so they had

to toss their cigarette butts out the window. Some even excused their behavior by saying it was okay because it gave someone a job.

How long do items stay on the freeway?

- A lot of people think things like cigarette butts decompose, but it can take several decades for a cigarette butt to disintegrate. A disposable diaper takes 550 years to disintegrate. Glass never wears out.

What about biodegradable items?

- A lot of people think biodegradable items are okay to litter. But it can take up to two years for an apple or a banana peel to decompose. And litter tends to attract more litter, people are more comfortable littering if litter is already present, so even biodegradable items create problems.

So what can people do to help?

- The good news is that we can easily reduce the amount of freeway litter, with help from you. Easy solutions are to use a litterbag in your vehicle, refrain from tossing any item out your window, including cigarettes. Don't keep trash in the bed of your pickup, and make sure vehicle loads are properly secured with tarps and tie downs.
- If you see someone **littering from a vehicle** you can call the Litter Hotline, toll free, at **1-877-3-LITTER** (That's 877-354-8837). You can also report them through our Website at **DontTrashAZ.com**. You will need to know the license number, make of vehicle, and location. While you will be asked to provide some personal information (such as your name), this information is for screening purposes only and will not be sent to the offender nor used for any other purpose.
- If you want to **report an area where trash has accumulated** on a freeway, you can call the ADOT complaint line at **602-712-7355**.

Where can we find out more information?

- We have a great Web resource, **DontTrashArizona.com** (you can spell out Arizona or put AZ) where we provide information, contact numbers, a reporting form to report littering, a kids' corner, and links to other litter groups, so we urge you to check it out.

Is the program making a difference?

- An evaluation survey conducted in August 2008 found a 30% increase in awareness of the Don't Trash Arizona slogan from the baseline survey conducted in December 2006, so the program is making a difference in awareness. It is more

difficult to move the needle when it comes to behavior, but the hope is that the increase in awareness will lead to changes in attitudes and ultimately to changes in behavior.

- ADOT reports a 66% reduction in litter complaints to since 2006. DPS recently issued a press release crediting Don't Trash Arizona with reducing citations for littering by 25%, and reducing citations for unsecured loads by 30%.
- Initial findings also show the number of people using litterbags in their vehicles has increased during the course of the campaign, also a stated goal of the project.