

LITTER FACT SHEET



LITTER IS UGLY, UNHEALTHY AND UNSAFE

- **Ugly:** More than 110,000 bags of litter are picked up from Valley freeways every year.
- **Unhealthy:** Toxic chemicals in cigarette butts can contaminate water systems.
- **Unsafe:** Debris on freeways causes 25,000 accidents in the U.S. every year.

TYPES OF LITTER*

- Cigarette butts: 38%
- Paper: 22%
- Plastic: 19%
- Glass: 4.5%
- Organic: 4.2%
- Construction debris: 2.6%
- Vehicle debris: 1.5%

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DECOMPOSE?

- Styrofoam container: More than 1 million years.
- Plastic jug: 1 million years.
- Aluminum can: 200 to 500 years.
- Plastic bag: 500 to 1000 years.
- Disposable diaper: 500 years.
- Banana peel: 3 weeks to 5 years.

LITTER ON FREEWAYS

- 51.2 billion pieces of litter are left on roadways in the U.S., equaling 6,729 pieces per mile.
- 425 bags of litter are removed each weekday from Valley freeways, totaling about 1.2 million pounds of litter each year.

LITTER COSTS

- The cost of a littering fine is \$500.
- Litter costs taxpayers \$3 million a year for the 150,000 hours of labor needed to clean up the Valley's roadways.
- Litter costs the Valley when it impacts efforts to attract new businesses and tourists.
- Litter costs the state economy in lost productivity, congestion and traffic delays when commuters sit in traffic because of litter in the through lanes.
- The cost of litter can be measured in lives: At least one person a year dies in Maricopa County from dangerous debris.

SECURE YOUR LOAD

- 45% of litter is accidental and comes from debris falling from trucks or from other unsecured loads.
- Unsecured loads can result in fines ranging from \$500 to \$1,000.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT HIGHWAY LITTER

- Keep and use a litterbag in your car at all times.
- Secure your loads with straps, tarps and nets. Be mindful of items that can blow out of or fall off your vehicle.
- Properly maintain your tires. Tire treads are easily worn out in Arizona's hot weather.
- Refrain from tossing out cigarette butts, the most common litter on the region's freeways. Keep a portable ashtray in your car.

PLEDGE NOT TO LITTER

- Go to www.DontTrashAZ.com and take the Safe Loads = Safe Roads pledge.

*Sources: 2009 Keep America Beautiful National Litter Study and <http://extra.mdc.mo.gov/nomoretrash/facts/>