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## **Most Common Litter: Biodegradable Trash, Small Paper, Cigarette Butts**

Study Shows Continued Effort Needed to Change Attitudes, Reduce Litter

**PHOENIX (Nov. 3, 2011)** – Before you toss that cigarette butt or apple core out the car window, consider this: It might stay there for years, attracting other litter, injuring wildlife, and impacting our economy by driving away tourists and business. Yet an annual survey conducted by Westgroup Research on behalf of the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) finds that biodegradable food items, small pieces of paper, and cigarette butts continue to top the list of the most commonly littered items in Maricopa County.

The survey of more than 600 Maricopa County residents also saw an increase in the number of people who admitted to littering in 2011 over the number in 2010 (26% vs 23%, an overall increase of 12%).

“People tend to think one small piece of paper or a banana peel tossed out the window isn’t a big deal. But with nearly four million residents in our region, that quickly adds up, and we spend millions of dollars each year cleaning up 1.6 million pounds of trash on our regional roadways,” said MAG Chair and Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman. “At a time when we are trying to attract business development in the Valley, the last thing we need is to create a poor impression of our region through an increase in freeway litter.”

Many people think that throwing food or other organic material out the window is okay because those items are biodegradable. But it can take up to two years for a banana peel or apple core to decompose, and because litter tends to attract more litter, such items compound the litter problem.

While a positive finding of the survey was a significant decrease in the number of people who said they or someone in their car threw a cigarette butt out the car window in the past three months (1% vs 8% in 2010), cigarette butts remain the third most-often littered item. The survey also found that less than half of smokers use an ashtray in their vehicle. Cigarette butts contain plastic filters that can take years to decompose, and the toxic chemicals from cigarettes can leach down into the water supply. Cigarette butts also pose a hazard to wildlife.

The biggest and most significant change over previous years was the increase in the number of residents who admitted to someone in their vehicle throwing a beverage container out the window. Approximately one in six (14%) residents claimed to have experienced this in the past year, an 87% increase from 2% in 2010.

### Other key findings:

- The survey confirmed previous results that males aged 18 to 34 are the most common litter offenders. The number of admitted litterers in that group also increased over last year.
- Fewer residents this year were likely to report having a litterbag in their car.
- Fewer truck drivers reported “always” securing their loads.
- The number of residents ranking litter as a big or moderate problem decreased from 2010.
- The littering circumstance cited most often by residents was “trash falling out of their vehicle,” experienced by 24 percent of respondents within the past three months.
- More than half of Arizonans (52%) are aware of the *Don’t Trash Arizona* (up from 43% in 2006).
- The percentage of residents who experienced tickets/warnings for littering in 2011 increased significantly from 2010 (8% vs. 1%).

The 2011 Litter Evaluation Survey is available in its entirety at the “Press Room” section of the website at [www.DontTrashArizona.com](http://www.DontTrashArizona.com).

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