

Litter Statistics Fact Sheet

What is the problem with litter?

- > Littering is an environmental crime. Litterers can be fined from \$144.36 on the spot or up to around \$8,000 if the matter is prosecuted in court. ⁽¹⁰⁾
- > Litter can cause blockages in the storm water system and flooding (costing councils thousands of dollars to repair). ⁽⁶⁾
- > Litter can be dangerous to people particularly when it involves items such as broken glass, needles and syringes. ⁽⁶⁾
- > Litter may be a fire hazard (lit cigarettes being thrown from vehicles). ⁽⁶⁾
- > Litter, such as cigarette butts, plastic bags and other plastics, harms animal and marine life in a variety of ways:
 - Through polluting the water they live in ⁽⁶⁾
 - When these items are mistaken for food ⁽⁴⁾
 - When creatures get caught up in plastics and get injured or even strangled. ⁽⁴⁾
- > Litter dropped in our streets travels into our waterways through the stormwater system. 95% of the litter on beaches comes from suburban streets through the stormwater system. ⁽⁸⁾
- > Litter makes an area look dirty and uncared for and attracts more litter. Littered areas are not pleasant to be in and are less likely to be used by people. In contrast, people are more reluctant to litter clean areas. ⁽²⁾
- > Litter is a direct financial cost to local and state governments, and therefore to the community. ⁽²⁾
- > Litter is one of the most visible signs of pollution and waste of resources. ⁽¹⁰⁾
- > *Toxocara Canis* is the roundworm that can be found in the faeces of infected dogs and can be passed onto humans. ⁽³⁾ In the United Kingdom it is reported to have caused cases of blindness in humans. ⁽⁹⁾

How much litter is there?

- > Approximately 7 billion cigarette butts are littered in Australia each year. ⁽¹⁾
- > Around 900,000 dogs in Victoria produce about 90 tonnes of dog poo each day. ⁽³⁾
- > A total of 41,875 tonnes of litter was collected through litter bins in 2009- 10, representing a 46.8% increase from 2008-09 figures. Over 1 tonne of litter is collected

from each Victorian council street litter bin each year, equivalent to nearly 12 standard size (1100 litres) skips.⁽⁷⁾

- > A total of 15,137 tonnes of illegally dumped rubbish was collected from 19,301 call-outs in 2009-10.⁽⁷⁾
- > Over 4000 litter traps, to stop litter entering the stormwater system, are installed and maintained by Victorian local councils. In 2009-10 they generated 2,700 tonnes, a decrease of 2.7% from the previous year.⁽⁷⁾
- > The overall average number of items per 1,000m² across 151 sites in Victoria surveyed in the 2011/12 National Litter Index was 36, well below the national average of 58. Litter volume estimates were 3.67 litres per 1000 m², down from 3.99 litres in 2010-2011.⁽¹³⁾

Is there more or less litter?

- > Littering in Victoria decreased in 2010 in malls (down to 25% from 27% in 2009) and at landmark locations (down to 11% from 12% in 2009).⁽²⁾
- > Large increases in public littering in Victoria were observed in park locations (up from 4% in 2009 to 19% in 2010), public buildings (up from 16% in 2009 to 87% in 2010) and events (up from 29% in 2009 to 48% in 2010).⁽²⁾
- > A total of 41,875 tonnes of litter was collected through litter bins in Victoria in 2009-10, representing a 46.8% increase from 2008-09 figures.⁽⁷⁾
- > Litter traps generated 2,700 tonnes, a decrease of 2.7% from the previous year.⁽⁷⁾

How much does litter cost?

- > The total cost of litter and street sweeping maintenance for local governments in Victoria is over \$78 million - or \$14.23 for every person in Victoria. Of this:
 - Street sweeping costs local government more than \$50 million. This equates to \$9.14 annually for every person in Victoria.⁽⁷⁾
 - Maintenance of litter bins, traps and litter clean up (such as illegally dumped rubbish) cost just under \$28 million.⁽⁷⁾
 - Dumped rubbish and roadside litter costs Victorian councils nearly \$22,000 a day to clean up.⁽⁷⁾
- > Approximately 95% of resources are allocated to litter management and 5% to litter prevention.⁽¹¹⁾
- > Cleaning up illegally dumped rubbish costs local government over \$4.5 million across 42 local governments, with a total of 15,137 tonnes collected from 19,301 call-outs.⁽⁷⁾

Who litters?

- > The 2010 public littering rate was 35%, meaning only 65% of Victorians are disposing of waste into bins in public places.⁽²⁾
- > The average number of littered items is higher for urban than for regional areas, with an average of 40 items for urban locations and 27 for regional locations.⁽²⁾
- > Men and women are equally likely to be seen using a bin or littering⁽²⁾ although young men are more likely to admit to littering.⁽⁶⁾
- > There is no such thing as a stereotypical litterer:⁽⁴⁾
 - Young people litter no more than people in older demographics when not they are not in groups.⁽¹⁰⁾
 - Students are more likely to litter than other people.⁽¹⁰⁾
 - Older people litter more when alone. For every other age group, researchers found people litter less when alone.⁽¹⁰⁾
 - Less than one third of older people who were observed littering admitted their behaviour when questioned.⁽¹⁰⁾

Why do people litter?

- > When asked why they litter, the most common reasons people give are:⁽⁵⁾
 - no bin nearby
 - too lazy
 - no ashtray nearby
 - it's a habit, or
 - don't know.
- > Littering behaviour is affected by:⁽⁶⁾
 - people thinking the item is not litter (cigarettes, food scraps)
 - people not being willing to look for a bin
 - lack of social pressure to do the right thing
 - absence of realistic penalties or consistent enforcement
 - social rebellion
 - lack of knowledge of the environmental effects of littering
 - poor packaging design
 - amount of litter already present at a particular site

- presence and wording of signs referring to litter
 - number/placement and appearance of bins at/near the site.
- > Five groups have been identified with respect to litter behaviours:⁽⁶⁾
- “Non-litterers” - environmentally conscious, don't litter and usually pick up others' litter
 - “Inconvenients” - not littering is too hard, too much trouble, someone else's problem
 - “Unaware” - unaware of the link between the environment and their litter behaviour
 - “Selectives” - usually litter in a context i.e. 'it's ok to litter in urban areas but not in the bush'
 - “Anti-establishments” - make a statement with purposeful littering
- > Clean equals clean! Clean areas tend to stay clean; they look cared for and do not invite trashing.⁽¹⁰⁾

What happens to people who get caught littering?

- > 14,757 penalty infringement notices for litter were issued in 2011-12.⁽¹⁴⁾
- > The majority of these were for cigarette butts littered from vehicles.⁽¹⁴⁾
- > Litterers can be fined on the spot from \$141 for a small piece of litter, such as chewing gum, an extinguished cigarette butt or a small piece of paper, or \$282 for a lit cigarette butt and other items. The matter can also be taken to court where the penalties can be much higher.⁽¹⁴⁾

What is littered?

- > Cigarette butts are the most littered item in Australia, and have been since 1997 when they were first counted. They constitute half of all litter.⁽¹⁰⁾
- > Butts are followed by beverage containers, paper (all types of paper and cardboard, takeaway food packaging), organics (food and animal faeces) and chewing gum.⁽¹⁰⁾⁽²⁾
- > Cigarette butts are the most frequently identified litter item, whilst plastic litter objects contribute the largest amount of volume to the litter stream.⁽¹³⁾
- > Household rubbish, green waste, furniture, electrical equipment, renovation and demolition waste are also significant litter problems.⁽⁴⁾
- > Illegal dumping is a very significant contributor to litter volumes despite not being a prevalent form of litter when counted by item. However currently counts are not conducted in the type of locations where illegal dumping is most common.⁽⁴⁾
- > Litter itself generates litter and poorly maintained environments generate litter.⁽⁴⁾

- > New sources of litter are becoming increasingly evident. Changing consumer patterns in relation to take-away food, increased use of unsolicited advertising materials and the introduction of automatic teller machines are examples of activities that now impact on litter.⁽⁶⁾
- > Lifestyles have also changed - we are busier, engage in more snacking and grazing and are increasingly relying on fast foods. This means more potential for litter in more places, more often.⁽⁶⁾
- > Top 10 littered items⁽¹²⁾
 1. Cigarette butts
 2. Glass bottles (alcohol and soft drink)
 3. Plastic bottles/ PET drink bottles
 4. Aluminium cans (alcohol and soft drink)
 5. Plastic bags
 6. Plastic chips and confectionary bags
 7. Plastic bottle caps
 8. Metal bottle caps
 9. Small paper pieces
 10. Metal foil confectionary wrappers

What about bins?

- > A total of 43,288 litter bins and 4,186 traps (side entry and in-line litter traps) were in place in Victorian local governments in 2009-10.⁽⁷⁾
- > The number of cigarette bin services increased by 11.4% in 2010-11 with 53 local governments (four more than last year) reporting a total of 2,215 cigarette bins.⁽⁷⁾

Where do people litter?

- > Easements (the public space immediately outside railway stations), transport and waterfront sites were the most littered site types in 2010.⁽²⁾
- > Urban areas score higher litter counts (averaging 40 items in 2010) than regional locations (averaging 27 items in 2010).⁽²⁾
- > The largest numbers of littered items are located within retail sites and industrial sites, while the largest volumes of litter objects are found at industrial and highway sites.⁽¹³⁾
- > Most rubbished site types:⁽¹²⁾
 1. Beach/coastal

2. Rivers and creeks
3. Parks
4. School grounds
5. Roadway
6. Public bushland
7. Shops/malls
8. Outdoor transport

Sources

- (1) [Butt Free Australia](#)
- (2) [The Victorian Litter Report 2010](#)
- (3) [Department of Primary Industries](#)
- (4) [Victorian Litter Strategy Issues Paper](#)
- (5) [Littering Behaviour Study 7 - National Benchmark 2004](#)
- (6) [NSW Department of Environment and Heritage](#)
- (7) [Victorian Local Government Annual Survey 2009-10](#)
- (8) [Clean Up Australia](#)
- (9) Encams, UK, 2003
- (10) [The Victorian Litter Strategy Background Paper](#)
- (11) [The Victorian Litter Strategy](#)
- (12) [The Rubbish Report 2011](#)
- (13) [The National Litter Index 2012](#)
- (14) [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) Victoria](#)