

Who Litters and Why People Litter?

Along roadways, motorists (52%) and pedestrians (23%) are the biggest contributors to litter. Research also shows that individuals under 30 are more likely to litter than those who are older. In fact, age, and not gender, is a significant predictor of littering behavior.

Why do people litter? Here's what KAB's 2009 Littering Behavior in America research found:

- Personal choice. Individual behavior—or choosing to litter—means litter on the ground. Nearly one in five, or 17% of all disposals observed in public spaces were littering, while 83% disposed of litter properly. And 81% of littering was intentional, e.g., flicking, flinging, or dropping. On the other hand, individuals who hold the belief that littering is wrong, and consequently feel a personal obligation not to litter, are less likely to do so.
- Litter begets litter. Individuals are much more likely to litter into a littered environment. And once there, it attracts more litter. By contrast, a clean community discourages littering and improves overall community quality of life. Availability and proximity to trash and recycling receptacles also impact whether someone chooses to litter.
- It's "not my responsibility". Some people feel no sense of ownership for parks, walkways, beaches, and other public spaces. They believe someone else will pick up after them; that it's not their responsibility.

Where do People Litter, and What Is Littered? KAB's 2009 *National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study* identified individual behavior as the primary contributor to litter in all locations. Individuals are littering on roads and highways and in retail, recreational, and residential locations:

- Roadway Litter - Tobacco products, mostly cigarette butts, are the most littered item on U.S. roadways (38%). This is followed by paper (22%) and plastic (19%). Most of the litter on roads and highways is caused by people. Research shows that littering along roadways is generated by the following individual actions: motorists (52%); pedestrians (22.8%); improperly covered truck or cargo loads, including collection vehicles (16.4%); and improperly secured containers, dumpsters, trash cans or residential waste or recycling bins (1.5%)
- Non-Roadway Litter – Off the roads and highways, litter originates from many sources, but litter primarily collects at “transition points”.
- Transition points are entrances to businesses, transportation, and other places where items must be discarded before entering. Confection (candy, chocolate, gum, etc.) ranks at the top (53.7%) of what is littered at transition points; this is followed by cigarette butts at 29.8%.

Other locations that attract litter—starting from where most non-roadway litter occurs to least—include:

- Storm drains - Located primarily in gutters and designed to drain excess rain from paved streets, parking lots, etc. storm drains tend to attract cigarette butts, confection, and other litter.
- Loading docks - Areas behind retail and wholesale business where products are loaded/unloaded from trucks and trailers can become littered with cigarette butts, confection, and paper.
- Recreational Areas - Parks, beaches, courts, and open areas where people congregate for leisure activities create lots of opportunities for littering.
- Construction sites - Active residential or commercial construction are a trap for cigarette butts, paper, and plastic.
- Retail – High-traffic locations such as shopping centers, strip malls, and convenience stores can generate packaging litter, and cigarette butts and confection on the ground.

(Source: Keep America Beautiful Inc. website www.kab.org)