

Litter Fact Sheet

WATER POLLUTION

Sources of water pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced in recent years. Now, more than 60% of water pollution comes from things like runoff from homes, excess fertilizer, and pet waste. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. So, believe it or not, the biggest source of water pollution today is not industry— it is actually households like yours. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water. And it starts with realizing that our sewers and storm systems are separate— what goes into the storm drains flows directly into the environment, untreated.



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What's The Problem With Litter?

When debris—plastic bags, bottles, cigarette butts, etc—is thrown on the ground, it gets washed into storm drains and directly into our waterways. In addition to potentially choking, suffocating, or disabling aquatic life like ducks, fish, turtles, and birds, litter decreases oxygen levels in the water when it decays. Litter is one of the most unsightly forms of pollution on our local waterways and can easily be prevented. Most litter can be recycled, which not only protects the environment, it saves our natural resources.

Facts And Figures

- Every day the average person walks or drives by 12,000 items of litter.
- **MYTH:** Cigarette filters are biodegradable. **FACT:** The acetate filters can take many years to decompose. Also, the toxic chemicals the filter was designed to trap leak out into aquatic ecosystems, threatening marine life.
- Cigarette butts may seem small, but with several trillion butts littered every year, they are the number one source of litter in this country.
- The lifespan (decomposition time) of commonly littered items:
Cigarette Butt: 1-5 years **Plastic Bag:** 10-20 years
Aluminum Can: 200-500 years **Glass Bottle:** 1 million years

What YOU Can Do

How can you help keep our waters clean?

- **DO NOT LITTER!** Carry a bag for waste in the car to eliminate the temptation to throw it out the window. Put litter in your pocket until you find a recycling container or a trash can.
- Recycle and reuse items whenever possible. Glass, paper, metal, cardboard, and plastic can be taken to recycling centers.
- Pick up **ONE** piece of litter every day! That's 365 less pieces of litter on our streets, in our parks, and around our schools thanks to you. Imagine if everyone picked up just one piece.
- Make sure your trash bins have lids that can be securely attached. Do not put out containers or boxes filled with debris.
- Keep litter out of pick up truck beds and cover loads so items are not blown off to the ground.
- Join a clean-up event