

## LITTER

Litter can be classed as rubbish thrown away in public places, and is seen as both a social and environmental problem (Ecorecycle). While classed as an environmental priority in many communities, littering continues to increase as lifestyles and attitudes change. With society becoming even busier, more snacking occurs, increasing the reliance on fast foods. This means more potential to litter more often. This is particularly the case in urban areas where people are often more detached from the natural environment (EPA).

Having said that, there is no specific 'type' of person who litters-no gender, age or class distinguishes litterers from non-litterers. Reasons for littering vary and may include people not thinking the item is litter, not bothering to find a bin, attitude to life in general, lack of social pressure and no real enforcement from authorities.

Typical areas littered are beach and coastal sites, other waterways, national parks, urban areas, roadways, coming into towns, major visitor spots and major sporting venues. Lack of bins is not a major reason for littering, as most littering is known to occur within 5 metres of a bin! Littering is most common around 4pm.

There appear to be five kinds of people in relation to litter; non litterers, who are environmentally conscious, do not litter and may pick up others' litter; inconvenients who see litter as 'someone else's problem'; ignorants who are unable to see a link between the environment and their litter; wilful arrogants who put litter in context such as 'there is litter here already, so its okay'; and anti-establishments who purposefully litter to make a statement.

It is estimated that several trillion cigarette butts are

littered worldwide every year from pavements and gutters to beaches and national parks. In fact, cigarettes are classed as the most littered item in the world, and in NSW this is no exception. With cigarette butts containing toxic residues and taking up to five years to break down, this is obviously a big problem. The many negative aspects of litter must be raised in public profile to help combat it by creating awareness of its seriousness.

References:

Environment Protection Authority. Available at [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm)

Ecorecycle. Available at

[www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/1517-home-page.asp?casid=2499](http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/1517-home-page.asp?casid=2499)

The effects of littering include:

- Reducing aesthetic appeal of public places
- Killing aquatic life directly through suffocation, entrapment or ingestion, and indirectly through its impacts on water quality
- Causing drain blockages and flooding sometimes costing millions to repair
- Hazardous to people (for example, broken glass, needles and syringes)
- Creating a fire hazard (for example, lit cigarettes from vehicles)
- Costs to the community through clean ups every year
- Can decrease oxygen levels in water

REFERENCE: Environment Protection Authority

[www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm)

### WHAT CAN I DO?

- Don't litter! Put it in the bin or take your waste with you to dispose of or recycle it responsibly. Lead by example.
- Help to keep your neighbourhood clean and litter free. Pick up after others who have littered.
- Join any 'rubbish clean up' groups in your local area.
- The Victorian Litter Action Alliance offers ideas on how to combat littering, available at <http://www.litter.vic.gov.au/default.asp?casid=2873>

### MORE INFORMATION

- [www.cigarettelitter.org](http://www.cigarettelitter.org) - Cigarette butts remain one of the most littered items in the world
- [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/litter/index.htm) - comprehensive site on littering in NSW
- [www.marine-litter.gpa.unep.org/](http://www.marine-litter.gpa.unep.org/) - the effects of littering on the marine environment
- [www.cleanup.com.au](http://www.cleanup.com.au) - Clean Up Australia's site includes their annual National Rubbish Report (under 'News & Info')