

Litter

The statistics on litter make sorry reading.

- In the UK 48% of the population admit to dropping litter.
- One third of drivers say they throw litter while on the road.
- Since the 1960s the amount of litter dropped yearly in the UK has increased by 500%.
- An estimated 122 tons of cigarette butts and cigarette-related litter are still dropped every day across the UK.
- But most litter is food and drink packaging.
- The rat population is now estimated as 60 million – there are almost as many rats as people in the UK.
- It costs over £858 million each year to clear litter from roads and streets in England. This excludes the cost of clearing the motorways and the major A-roads which are the responsibility of the Highways Agency and the cost of removing fly-tipping.
- In 2006 over 373,000 pieces of litter were found on beaches in the UK - equivalent to almost 2000 items per kilometre. That same year the Marine Conservation Society reported a 90% increase in beach litter since 2004.

The Problem

For official purposes the amount of litter is measured in Standard Quantity Intervals - the higher the score the less the amount of litter. The figures are calculated by Keep Britain Tidy, an arms-length Government body, formerly called Encams.

A score of 5 to 8 is graded good, 1 to 4 satisfactory, -1 to -4 unsatisfactory, -5 to -8 poor. (The same scores are sometimes graded A, B, C and D.)

For the twelve months from March 2006 to April 2007 – the last year for which figures are available – the general figure for the level of litter in England dropped to unsatisfactory. In particular there was a significant increase in roadside litter.

Each year Keep Britain Tidy looks at a representative sample of local authorities throughout England. In 2006/7 they looked at twelve local authorities in the North East Region and they scored as follows.

North East Region

Litter Assessment 2006/2007

Source: CPRE based on Encams figures

North of the Tyne

Local Authority	Litter overall	Rural roads
Alnwick	Satisfactory (1)	Satisfactory (1)
Berwick upon Tweed	Satisfactory (2)	Satisfactory (3)
Blyth Valley	Unsatisfactory (-1)	Unsatisfactory (-3)
Castle Morpeth	Satisfactory (1)	Unsatisfactory (-2)
North Tyneside	Unsatisfactory (-1)	Poor (-5)
Wansbeck	Unsatisfactory (-2)	Unsatisfactory (-2)

South of the Tyne

Local Authority	Litter overall	Rural roads
Darlington	Satisfactory (1)	Unsatisfactory (-3)
Durham City	Satisfactory (1)	Unsatisfactory (-3)
Easington	Unsatisfactory (-2)	Unsatisfactory (-3)
Hartlepool	Unsatisfactory (-2)	Unsatisfactory (-3)
Sedgefield	Unsatisfactory (-1)	Satisfactory (1)
Sunderland	Unsatisfactory (-2)	Unsatisfactory (-4)

A Culture Change

Persuading people not to litter requires a culture change; difficult to achieve but not impossible. For instance in recent years there has been a culture change about picking up dogs' faeces. Most dog owners now pick them up, and there is a public expectation that this should happen. Somehow people have to be persuaded that they should not drop litter because we live in an attractive countryside and that we should all help to keep it that way. We need to build up a consensus that people who drop litter are acting anti-socially.

Littering is anti-social because:

- Wherever it drops it defiles the neighbourhood
- The £780 million it costs to pick it up could be much better spent on other things
- Litter that is not picked up takes very long periods to disappear naturally. Under unfavourable conditions it may take:

Orange peel and banana skins - 2 years

Cigarette butts -	2 years
Plastic bags -	10 – 20 years
Tin cans -	50 years
Aluminium cans -	80 – 100 years
Plastic bottles -	several hundred years
Glass -	several hundred years.

So it makes sense NOT to drop litter.

Taking Action

Go Plastic Bag Free

Use permanent shopping bags when you go to the supermarket. At present 13 billion plastic bags are distributed each year. This is one area where the culture is already changing - your example will help persuade others to do the same.

In 2007 Modbury in Devon was the first town in Europe to banish the plastic bag - all its 43 shops and traders agreed not to use them.

Report Litter

District, borough and unitary councils (as distinct from county councils) have a legal obligation to collect litter. Most have a dedicated number for this purpose which the operator on their main number should be able to give you. If you do not know the name of the council for the area concerned you should be able to find this through www.direct.gov.uk

Dropping litter is illegal and can incur a fine of £80. Some councils now have community wardens who can serve an offender with a fixed penalty notice, although they mainly operate in urban areas. If your local authority operates a fixed penalty scheme and you see litter being thrown from a vehicle, you should take its number and report it to the local authority. It is probable that the driver will then be sent a fixed penalty notice. Otherwise you can report the offence to the Police but they will be unable to take action unless you can certify it was the driver who threw it or alternatively you can identify the person who did.

Litter on motorways and principal trunk roads is the responsibility of the Highways Agency, and in North East Region these are:

A1, A1 (M), A194 (M), A19, A69, A66.

Reports of litter on these roads should be made to Highways Agency Information on 0845 7 504030.

Write Campaigning Letters.

For each local authority CPRE National Office website suggests the name of the person you should write to about litter. (No doubt it would be sensible to check that the name remains valid.) It also gives a draft letter which you can use if you wish. (Go to www.cpre.org.uk; then click in succession Campaigns, Stop the Drop, Take Action; then follow the instructions under 'Report a litter or fly-tipping problem to your local council'.)

Join or Set Up a Voluntary Litter Pick Group

District, borough and unitary councils have a legal obligation to collect litter and most do so conscientiously. But collecting all items is an enormous task. To achieve 'good' gradings on litter would require councils to employ many additional staff on litter picking, with consequent increases in Council Tax which residents would not like and which the Government might not permit. There is therefore a role for voluntary groups to supplement council litter-picking. And maybe this can even be seen as a modern development of an old custom: that each householder should keep clean the road and pavement outside their own house.

People are more likely to throw litter if there is already a lot of it lying about; no doubt because if an area is badly littered they feel that it is reasonable to add to it. So making sure that litter is picked up may be one way of reducing the amount dropped. This does not mean that a spotless area will remain litter free, but it is likely to receive less rubbish than be-littered sites elsewhere.

In particular, voluntary litter groups can make a big difference on rural roads where litter cannot be collected by machine and where it may be blown across wide grass verges and into and under hedges. Unfortunately it is easiest to spot the litter in winter when the grass has died back and the hedges have lost their leaves - but when picking can be cold or wet or both!

If you wish to start your own group but are uncertain how to begin, you can consult www.littercation.org.uk This is a website set up jointly by CPRE and Clean Up UK and it gives advice about forming a group. It also lists over 100 litter groups who are registered with it, and the number continues to increase.

Stop the Drop Campaigners Guide (a series of advice sheets) has some guidance on how to organise a community clean-up day. A leaflet by Encams called 'Litter – Organising a Cleanup' also has detailed advice on the same subject. It can be downloaded from www.encams.org.uk/publications

CPRE National Office

Samantha (Sam) Harding (020 7981 2816 and samanthah@cpre.org.uk) is the National Office organiser for Stop the Drop.

In addition to organising considerable publicity for Stop the Drop, National Office is currently seeking to promote a deposit scheme for plastic bottles. This works well in some other countries. A deposit of 10p per bottle would induce many users to return them for recycling - and would encourage children and other passers-by to pick up any that were discarded as litter.

Fly-tipping

Fly-tipping is the illegal dumping of waste, varying in quantity from a bin bag of rubbish to truckloads of discarded materials.

In the twelve months April 2006 to March 2007 local authorities in England reported 2.6 million fly-tipping incidents. (Remarkably, half of all these incidents were in Liverpool.) However, the total figure is probably an understatement as many fly-tips on private land are not reported.

A survey by the National farmer's Union in 2002 stated that 67% of farmers suffered from fly-tipping.

The total number of incidents in the North East region for 2006/2007 was 86,137, an increase of 3% on the previous year. 86,137 incidents equate to 34 incidents per thousand inhabitants, and only the North West and London have higher figures. If Liverpool is excluded, the North West figure reduces to 19 incidents per thousand people and on this basis the North East ranks second only to London as having the highest number of incidents per head of population.

North East Region

Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside

Fly-tipping incidents reported to Local Authorities March 2006 – April 2007

Note: in addition many fly-tips on private land were probably not reported

Source: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/flytipping/flycapture

	Number of incidents	Estimated cost of clearance £000	Approx cost per incident £	Number of prosecutions
Alnwick DC	194	11	57	0
Berwick -u- Tweed BC	189	14	74	0
Blyth Valley BC	1,097	37	34	0
Castle Morpeth BC	738	45	61	0
Newcastle –u- Tyne CC	15,525	1,658	106	46 (43 successful)
North Tyneside Coun	1,278	69	54	1 (successful)
Tynedale DC	108	4	37	0
Wansbeck DC	588	36	61	0
Total	19,717	1,874		
Rest of North East Region				
(15 councils)	64,878	3,865		72 (68 succesful)

Anyone fly-tipping can incur a fine of up to £20,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment. But if a case is sufficiently serious to be referred to the Crown Court the penalty can be greater: an unlimited fine, up to 2 years imprisonment or 5 years if hazardous waste is dumped.

Local Authorities are responsible for removing fly-tips from public land and roads. They are not responsible for clearing fly-tips on private land where the cost of removal falls on the farmer or other landowner. A Local Authority can issue a litter abatement order where an organisation or a landowner fails to clear up a fly-tip. Failure to comply with such an order can result in a fine of up to £2500, plus an additional £125 for each day the litter remains.

Most local authorities deal promptly with fly-tipping on land for which they are responsible. So if you come across a fly-tip it is likely the local authority is not aware of it, and it therefore makes sense to report it.

For major or dangerous fly-tips the **Environment Agency** should be involved:

- If more than one large lorry load has been tipped or
- There is a large quantity of asbestos or containers which may contain hazardous waste or
- The waste has been dumped in water or is causing pollution or posing a flood risk in a watercourse

You should phone the Environment Agency (24 hours) on 0800 807060.

For general enquiries about the Environment Agency phone 08708 506506 or refer to www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

CPRE **Hampshire Branch** have produced a useful leaflet on fly-tipping and this is available through their office on 01962 843655.