

# LITTER IN AMERICA

Results from the nation's largest litter study

## KEY FINDINGS: THE COSTS OF AMERICANS LITTERING

The 2009 National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study\* documents the direct and indirect costs of litter to communities, schools, and businesses. While visible roadside litter is down 61% since 1969, litter, and littering behavior, remains a persistent and costly problem.

### BREAKDOWN OF DIRECT LITTER COSTS IN THE U.S.

**Litter clean up costs the U.S. more than an estimated \$11.5 billion each year.**

- Businesses pay \$9.1 billion of clean up costs, or about **80%**.
- States, cities, and counties together expend \$1.3 billion on litter abatement. **Litter removal is often a hidden cost within employee expenses or other projects which makes it difficult to determine the actual cost to local governments.**
- Educational institutions spend approximately \$241 million dollars annually for litter clean up. **Similar to local governments, litter costs are often not included as a budget line item, making it difficult to determine the time spent on cleanup in hallways, cafeterias, and sports facilities.**
- Many communities depend on volunteers to clean up litter, a trend that will likely grow.
- Continuing population growth—about 3.5 million/year—will strain litter abatement efforts. Even if litter is reduced on a per capita basis, more people will tend to result in more litter.
- As the U.S.—along with state and local governments—struggles economically, budget cuts may reduce tax-funded litter clean-up programs.

### THE INDIRECT COSTS OF LITTER ON QUALITY-OF-LIFE ARE CONSIDERABLE.

Indirect costs include the degree to which litter reduces the value of real estate, deters a customer from entering a business, or a new employer from locating to a community. To measure these impacts of litter, the 2009 study surveyed homeowners, realtors, and business development officials.

- **93% of homeowners say a littered neighborhood would decrease their assessment of a home's value and influences their decision to purchase a property.** And 40% estimated that litter would reduce a home's value by 10% to 24%.
- 36% of business development officials say that **litter impacts a decision to locate to a community.**
- 55% of realtors think that **litter reduces property values by about 9%.**
- 60% of property appraisers **would reduce a home's value if it was littered.**
- **The presence of litter in a community decreases property values by a little over 7%,** according to the National Association of Home Builders pricing model.

**MORE ON REVERSE SIDE...**

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## LITTER HAS COSTLY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

- The environmental outcomes of litter can have economic impacts. This includes lost tourism revenues, expenses for repairing vehicles, boats and ships, restoration of ecosystems, wildlife injury, and eventually the cost to human health.
- Debris may be carried by storm drains into local waterways, with potential for serious environmental contamination. Wind and weather, traffic, and animals all move litter into gutters, lawns and landscaped areas, alleyways, and parking structures.

DIRECT COSTS OF LITTER	
ENTITY TYPE	COST (IN MILLIONS)
States	\$ 363
Counties	\$ 185
Municipalities	\$ 797
Businesses	\$ 9,128
Educational	\$ 240
NGOs	\$ 769
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 11,482</b>