KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL

2026 National Litter Study

Summary Report

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Forward

A Message from Keep America Beautiful President and CEO Jennifer Lawson

For more than 70 years, Keep America Beautiful has been creating cleaner, greener, more beautiful communities across the country. Our work is grounded in the belief that when people come together to care for the places they share, meaningful and lasting change follows.

The Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study is our most comprehensive effort to understand the scope, causes, and impacts of litter in the United States. It builds on decades of research, reflecting how far we have come and how much more we can do together.

Litter is more than an unsightly nuisance. It affects the health of our environment and the safety and well-being of our communities. It shapes how people feel about where they live, influencing community pride, economic opportunity, and even public safety. Some days, it feels like one of the few issues Americans can agree on.

Since our founding in 1953, when leaders from corporations, civic and conservation organizations, and government agencies came together around the growing problem of litter, Keep America Beautiful has taken a collaborative, cross-sector approach to litter prevention and beautification. Through education, partnerships, and a science-based theory of change, we help communities turn awareness into action, and action into lasting impact.

Data has always played a vital role in our work. This Study is unique because it examines both the physical presence of litter and the attitudes and behaviors behind it. The survey of visible litter provides national estimates across roadways, waterways, and, for the first time, coastal areas. A public attitudes survey complements those findings with insight into how Americans perceive litter and their role in addressing it.

The findings point to both progress and urgency. Meaningful change is possible, but sustained effort is needed to address new and persistent challenges. The Study also reinforces our belief that litter reduction requires an informed public, effective systems, strong partnerships, and communities working together.

We are proud of how far we have come thanks to our affiliates, partners, and millions of volunteers. But the real impact of this work is what it makes possible in communities every day. When parks are litter-free, kids come out to play. When Main Street is clean, businesses open their doors. When vacant lots turn green, property values go up and crime goes down. When we pick up litter or plant flowers, we make our neighborhoods safer, healthier, and more connected. **With this data to guide us, we have the opportunity and responsibility to build on this momentum as we work toward a cleaner, healthier future for all.**

I want to acknowledge the partners and funders who made this Study possible. Their commitment to advancing understanding and solutions is helping drive meaningful impact at a national scale. I am also grateful to the researchers, field teams, and technical experts whose work ensures the rigor and credibility of this effort. Special thanks go to Dr. David Scott, our Senior Vice President of Research and Data, for his leadership in guiding this Study. And last, but never least, my deepest gratitude goes to our affiliates, volunteers, board members, and staff who bring this work to life every day. Thanks for helping us do beautiful things where it matters most!

Jennifer Lawson
President and CEO
Keep America Beautiful

Introduction

The Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study was designed to advance our understanding of the scale and nature of litter in the United States. It examines not only the quantity, composition, and sources of litter, but also the factors that influence littering behavior and public attitudes, as well as the systems that shape litter outcomes over time. Through the use of a consistent, standardized methodology, the Study establishes a reliable framework for measuring change and tracking progress across years.

The 2026 Study builds on a legacy of landmark research by Keep America Beautiful, including the foundational 1969 Study, the comprehensive 2009 assessment of roadway litter, and the expanded 2020 Study, which for the first time produced a national estimate of litter along surface waterways.

The latest research documents litter across roadways, surface waterways, and coastal areas, while examining the behavioral, infrastructural, and systemic forces that shape litter patterns nationwide. It also extends the research in several important ways. Most notably, it delivers the first national estimate of coastal litter, adding a critical new dimension to understanding how litter affects environments across the U.S. And by incorporating longitudinal tracking at roadway and waterway sites first measured in 2020, the Study also enables direct comparisons over time, providing the most robust trend analysis to date.

The study is built around two lines of research: a Visible Litter Study that estimates the amount and type of litter nationwide, and a Public Attitudes Survey that explores how Americans view litter and their role in addressing it.

Together, these components—longitudinal measurement, expanded environmental coverage, detailed material and product analysis, and national attitudinal data—provide a comprehensive assessment of litter in the U.S. The sections that follow examine where progress is being made, where challenges remain, and how communities can continue to address litter.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Litter

Improperly managed waste, including both intentionally discarded items (e.g., cigarette butts, food packaging) and unintentionally misplaced waste (e.g., material from overflowing containers, unsecured loads, illegal dumping, and vehicle-related debris).

Littering

The behavior of a person or organization that results in waste being improperly placed in the environment.

Methodology

Conducted during the same period as the 2020 Study (late summer), the Visible Litter Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the quantity, composition, and sources of litter across roadways, waterways, and coastal areas in the United States. Building on methodologies used in the 1969, 2009, and 2020 studies, the HDR Project Team conducted fieldwork at 700 randomly selected sites nationwide, producing data representative of conditions across the U.S.

To enable direct comparison over time, roadway and surface waterway sites first sampled in 2020 were resampled in 2025, with additional sites included to strengthen the validity of the estimates. Coastal sites were added for the first time in 2025, expanding the Study's environmental coverage.

At each site, litter was categorized into nine material groups and 115 product categories—a 33% increase in detail from previous studies **(See Appendix for Table 1 and all data tables)**. Each item was also assigned to one of five sources: motorist, pedestrian, improperly secured loads, overflowing containers, or vehicle debris. Additional data were collected on the environmental conditions and context in which litter was found. With approximately 30,000 new consumer products introduced into the U.S. market annually, it was impossible for us to provide litter data for specific products or brands.

To complement the field research, Keep America Beautiful retained The Harris Poll to conduct a national Public Attitudes Survey. The survey of 3,000 U.S. residents, conducted in Fall 2025, provides insight into how Americans perceive litter, including its prevalence, causes, impacts, and approaches to prevention and cleanup.

This summary report presents an overview of the Study's key findings. Further analyses and research products will explore the implications of the data and inform future solutions, partnerships, and programs.

Visible Litter in America – Key Findings

Overall, **litter levels have declined nationwide**, demonstrating that coordinated efforts to reduce litter are working. But the data also show **persistent and emerging challenges** that require continued focus. **Thirty-five billion pieces of litter** remain, and **certain categories are increasing**, reflecting shifts in consumer behavior and waste streams.

As the Study makes clear, progress is possible but not guaranteed. Sustaining and accelerating that progress will require continued attention to the systems, behaviors, and conditions that influence how litter is generated, managed, and prevented.

SNAPSHOT OF LITTER IN AMERICA

From 2020 to 2025, **litter** along America's roadways and surface waterways **declined by**

34%

↓ **49.6 billion**
32.6 billion pieces

When **coastal areas, estimated nationally for the first time,** are included in the total, there are approximately

35 billion
pieces of litter

across America's roadways, waterways, and coastal areas.

Litter per capita
along roadways and waterways

↓ **152** to **96**
pieces per person.

Roadway litter in America is down

22%

↓ **2,857 items** per mile in 2020
2,204 items per mile in 2025.

(This comes on top of a 54% reduction in roadway litter between 2009 and 2020.)

Litter along **America's surface waterways** like our rivers, streams, and lakes **decreased**

45%

↓ **2,411 items** per mile in 2020
1,300 items per mile in 2025

Cigarette butts, which continue to be the single most littered item,

↓62%

over the past five years
along roadways and waterways, outpacing the decline in smoking among Americans.

Litter decreased across almost all categories of materials tracked in the Study. Among the categories that comprise the most frequently littered products:

- ↓ **plastic** 24%
- ↓ **paper** 45%
- ↓ **glass** 34%
- ↓ **metal** 30%
- ↓ **organics** 77%
- ↓ **smoking & tobacco products** 60%

While this progress is encouraging, there's still far too much litter in America, and litter rates are increasing in some categories.

Litter from tires, tire treads, and vehicle debris
↑36%

Cardboard litter
↑50%

mirroring consumption trends over the past five years.

Very small items (under 4 inches) dominate the litter stream

84%
of all litter

roadways	waterways	coastal areas
88%	78%	91%

Coastal areas have higher litter density

roadways	waterways
16,800	2,200	1,300

pieces per mile

underscoring a distinct and urgent challenge for these fragile ecosystems.

Public Attitudes Survey – Key Findings

Nearly all Americans (94%), regardless of geography, age, or political affiliation, **view litter as a problem in the United States**. Strong majorities identify it as an issue in their state (90%) and in their own community (76%) (Figure 1).

Litter is also a common topic of conversation. More than one in four Americans (28%) report discussing litter with friends or family in the past year, with engagement especially high among younger adults and urban residents (Figure 2).

And while 90% of Americans say it is their "personal responsibility to help reduce litter," 74% acknowledge that they have littered at some point in their lives, with 13% saying they have littered in the past month (Figure 3). About 70% of Americans say they have witnessed someone else litter in the past year.

Survey results suggest that **people are more likely to litter when disposal options are inconvenient or unavailable**, and when they assume the problem will be addressed by others.

There is broad interest in participating in community-based cleanup and beautification efforts and a consensus that these efforts should be used to bring Americans together. Nearly all Americans agree that, regardless of politics, "cleaning and greening America should be a top priority for everyone."

Figure 1: Litter is a problem in...

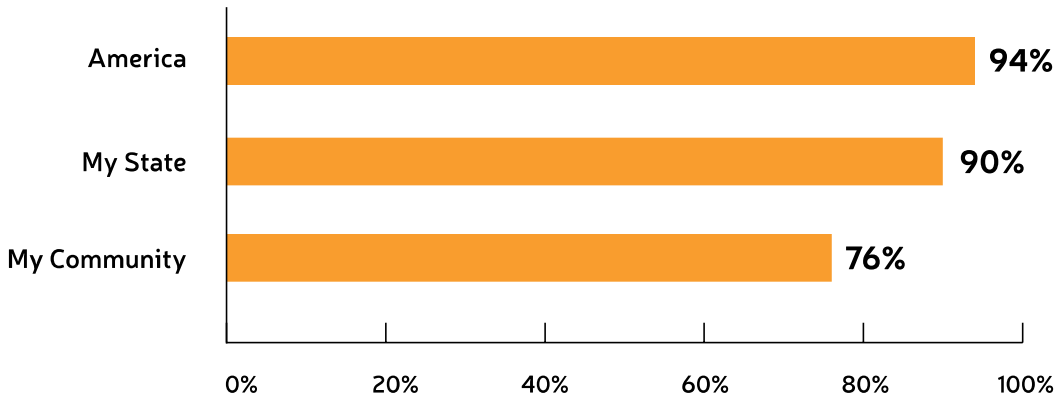


Figure 2: Litter compared with other discussion topics

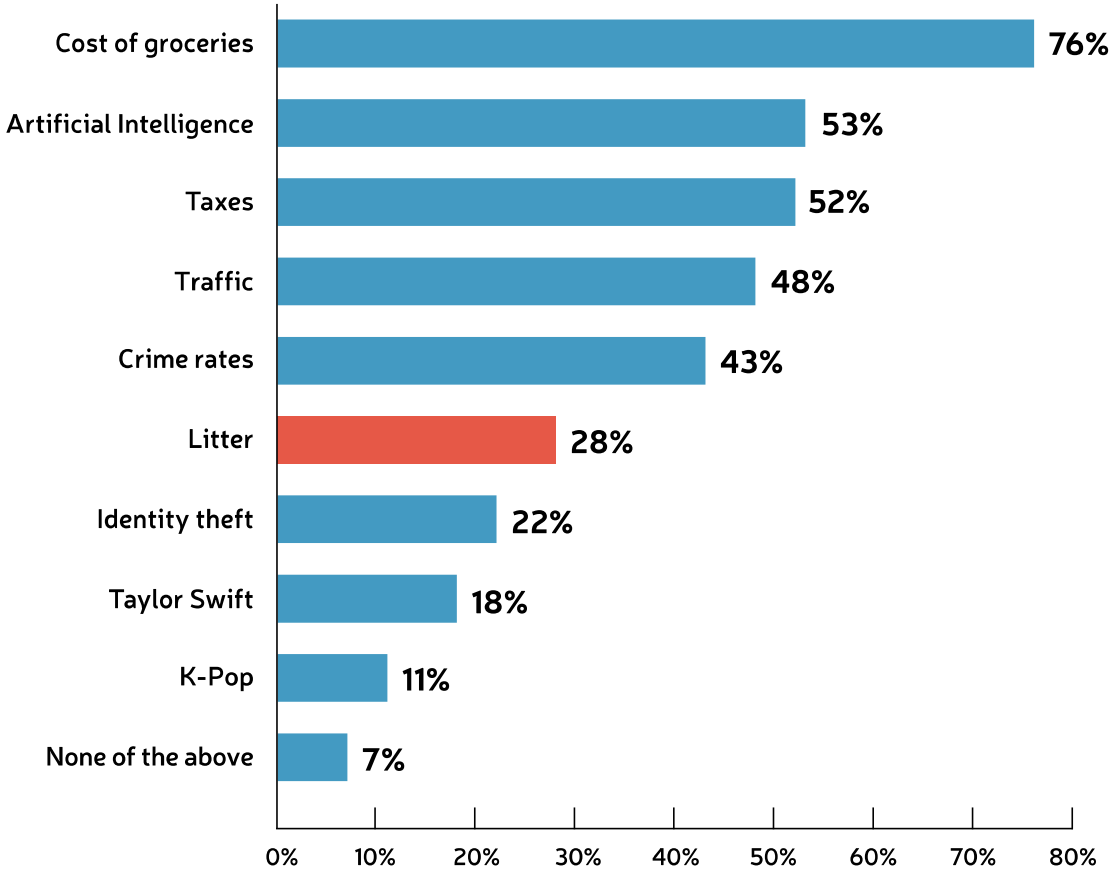
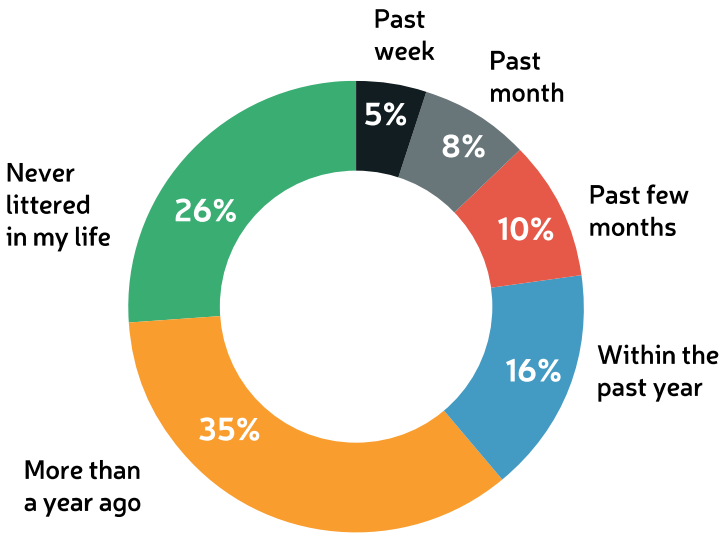


Figure 3: The last time I personally littered was...



A Closer Look

TOTALS ARE DECLINING, BUT LITTER REMAINS A SERIOUS PROBLEM ACROSS THE U.S.

From 2020 to 2025, litter along America's roadways and surface waterways declined by 34%, marking real and measurable progress. Even so, an estimated **35 billion pieces of litter** remain across the nation's roadways, waterways, and coastal areas on any given day, making litter an everyday reality for most Americans.

Even though it is individual products, not materials, which are littered, examining litter at the material level helps to simplify a complex landscape. **Declines in litter across most major material groups**—including plastic, paper, glass, and metal—signal positive momentum in the nation's work to address litter.

At the same time, some data point to areas of concern. **Litter from tires and vehicle debris increased by more than 36% since 2020,** and growth in several individual product categories—such as certain packaging types, cardboard litter, and construction debris—highlights the evolving nature of the litter stream and the need for more targeted, product specific prevention strategies.

One of the most notable successes is the reduction in cigarette butt litter. Building on declines documented between 2009 and 2020, the Study finds that cigarette butt litter fell by approximately 62% in just five years. This decrease far outpaces the 1–3 percentage point decline in cigarette smoking during the same period, indicating that factors beyond reduced consumption are driving change.

Of the roughly 17 billion piece reduction in roadway and waterway litter between 2020 and 2025, an estimated 35% is attributable to declines in smoking and tobacco related litter (primarily cigarette butts), 27% to reductions in plastic products, and 20% to decreases in paper products. Together, these shifts demonstrate that **targeted interventions—such as behavior change strategies, policy measures, and improved disposal infrastructure—can produce large, measurable improvements in the litter stream**.

Public perception, however, has not kept pace with these gains. Nearly all Americans (94%) view litter as a national problem, and when asked about conditions locally, **55% say litter levels in their community are about the same as five years ago, while only 17% believe conditions have improved.** This disconnect between measured progress and lived experience underscores how litter remains highly visible in peoples' daily life and why sustained, place-based efforts are essential to making progress feel tangible.

A Closer Look

LITTER IS SOLVABLE, BUT PROGRESS IS NOT ASSURED

With nearly 35 billion pieces of litter scattered across our national landscape, America's litter problem can feel overwhelming—if not impossible to solve. The Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study offers encouraging evidence that litter is a solvable issue and that meaningful progress is underway. Since 2020, litter along America's roadways and surface waterways has declined substantially, demonstrating that when communities, businesses, policymakers, and individuals act together, real change is possible. The Study shows that coordinated efforts—rooted in shared responsibility and sustained action—can deliver measurable results.

Sustaining this momentum is not guaranteed. Continued progress requires innovation and long-term commitment, particularly to address emerging challenges in coastal environments and for product categories where litter is increasing or especially damaging. The path forward must build on what works: education that drives behavior change; systems that make proper disposal and prevention an easy choice; and collaboration among communities, businesses, and government to reinforce and scale effective solutions.

WHY LITTER MATTERS: PUTTING THE LITTER STUDY IN CONTEXT

Litter has far reaching consequences for both the natural environment and the communities people call home. It degrades environmental quality by **damaging soil and groundwater** through runoff, **endangering wildlife** through ingestion and entanglement, and **creating public health risks** when items such as tires collect water and serve as mosquito breeding grounds.

Beyond these ecological impacts, litter shapes how communities function and how they are perceived. **The presence of litter signals neighborhood health and desirability,** drives down property values, discourages business investment, and undermines tourism.

The financial burden of preventing and managing litter— borne by individuals, local governments, and businesses—exceeds **$10 billion annually** (Keep America Beautiful, 2009). Together, these impacts demonstrate that litter is not merely an aesthetic concern, but **a defining feature of community safety, health, and wellbeing.**

As the Study confirms, litter is both a symptom and a cause of broader challenges related to environmental quality, community cohesion, and public trust.

As the Study confirms, litter is both a symptom and a cause of broader challenges related to environmental quality, community cohesion, and public trust. It is highly visible, widely recognized, and ultimately solvable. Addressing litter in a meaningful way requires not only effective infrastructure and policy but also **a culture of shared responsibility and a collective determination** to protect the places where people live, work, and gather.

Data Insights

HOW LITTER IS CHANGING

Understanding the composition of litter—what it is, where it appears, and how its patterns are changing—is essential to developing effective prevention and mitigation strategies. The Study reveals a highly diverse mix of materials and product types shaped by consumption trends, packaging design, disposal behaviors, and environmental pathways.

Products made from plastic remain a challenge.

Across roadways and surface waterways, products made from plastic dominate the litter stream, reflecting both the ubiquity of plastic consumer products and packaging and the persistence of plastic products if they are not disposed of, recycled, or managed appropriately.

Nationally, plastic is the largest material category overall, with an estimated 15.4 billion pieces of plastic litter across roadways, waterways, and coastlines. Paper follows at 4.2 billion pieces, closely followed by smoking and tobacco products (4.0 billion) and glass (3.6 billion). These totals highlight both the scale of littered products made from plastic and the continued importance of other high volume material streams with significant recycling potential.

Cigarette butts remain the most littered item despite sharp declines.

Cigarette butts remain the single most littered item in the U.S., representing a persistent and significant component of the national litter stream. At any given time, more than 3.8 billion cigarette butts are present across the nation's roadways, waterways, and coastal areas. Their prevalence is closely tied to broader patterns observed in litter nationwide, including **the dominance of very small littered items—those less than four inches in length—which account for the vast majority of litter by count** and are particularly difficult to manage through conventional cleanup methods alone.

However, the Study also shows a substantial and sustained decrease in cigarette butt litter over time. Where trends can be measured along roadways and waterways, **cigarette butt litter decreased by 62% between 2020 and 2025**, building on an additional nearly 70% reduction from 2009 to 2020. These reductions far exceed the decline in smoking rates alone, indicating that factors beyond reduced consumption have played a critical role in addressing this form of litter.

Data Insights

AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD LITTER

Litter is shaped not only by infrastructure and systems, but by beliefs, attitudes, social norms, expectations, and shared responsibility. Understanding **how Americans perceive litter—and how those perceptions relate to behavior—is critical to reducing it at scale.**

To complement the measurement of visible litter, the Study includes a **Public Attitudes Survey conducted by The Harris Poll** to capture how Americans think about litter, how they behave, and what motivates them to take action.

Against a backdrop of what The Harris Poll describes as a landscape of "stacked crises"—including political division, economic pressures, rapid technological change, and global instability—**litter remains a visible and emotionally resonant issue for most Americans**, who overwhelmingly recognize litter's negative impacts on the environment, public health and safety, businesses and tourism, and local economies (Figure 4).

The research makes clear that Americans are not only aware of the litter problem, they believe in their responsibility to help solve it. **This sense of shared duty among individuals, communities, and organizations emerges as one of the strongest and most consistent findings across the Public Attitudes Survey**. It signals both a cultural shift toward collective stewardship and a powerful foundation for future action.

Despite these positive attitudes toward addressing litter, littering remains widespread in practice, underscoring the scale of the challenge. **Littering is often described as "a crime of inconvenience,"** a characterization the research clearly supports. Respondents cite **convenience, limited access to disposal bins, and the assumption that "someone else will pick it up"** as common drivers of littering, underscoring the importance of infrastructure, education, and norm-shifting strategies. Observing others litter also plays a powerful role in shaping social norms, which in turn influences whether individuals dispose of waste properly.

Overall, litter is widely recognized, widely discussed, and widely felt by Americans, making it both a persistent challenge and a powerful opportunity for collective action. **Americans across demographic groups and political identities express near-universal agreement that they have a role to play in reducing litter—**90% of Americans say it is their "personal responsibility to help reduce litter" and 93% agree that "all community residents have a shared responsibility to help reduce litter." This mindset counters the idea that litter prevention is solely the job of government or cleanup crews and underscores that most **people understand their own role in the solution** (Figure 5).

Not only do Americans believe they should act, they want to act. **The survey shows a powerful and growing appetite for community involvement,** especially when thinking about getting ready to celebrate **America's 250th birthday** on July 4, 2026.

More than four out of five Americans (84%) agree that "I'd love to accomplish something with my community (e.g., planting trees, improving recycling, organizing a cleanup) and bring people together in the process," an increase from 75% just six months earlier. Even more Americans (92%), agree that "Republican, Democrat, or somewhere in-between, cleaning and greening America should be a top priority for everyone," up 14 percentage points from six months prior.

When asked what motivates them to get involved, Americans gravitate toward solutions that foster connection and are rooted in community. They say they are more likely to stay involved when they can work alongside others and see the difference they are making. **These findings reinforce Keep America Beautiful's belief that addressing litter not only creates cleaner public spaces, but also strengthens the social fabric of our communities**.

Figure 4: Americans believe litter has a negative impact in these areas

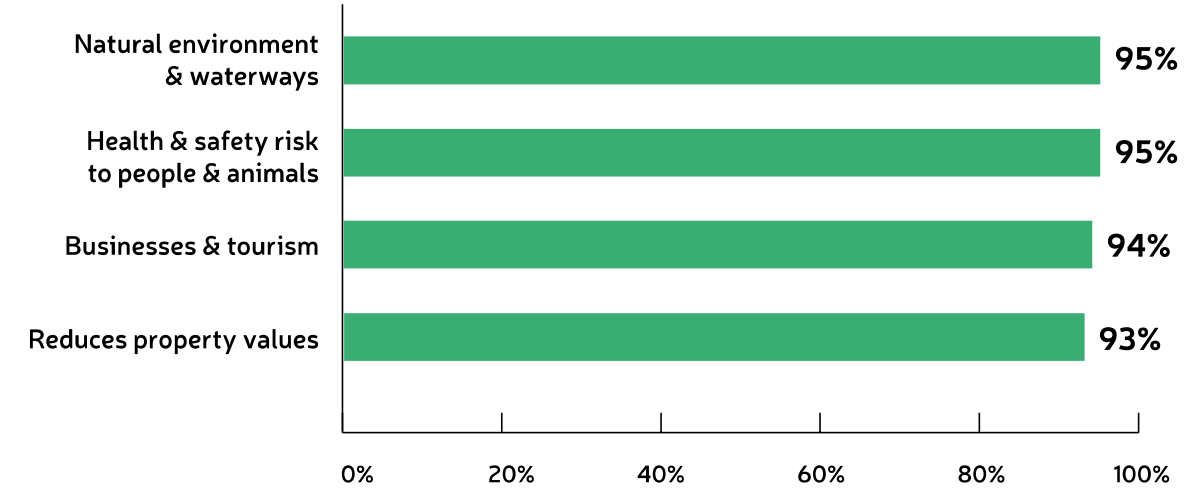
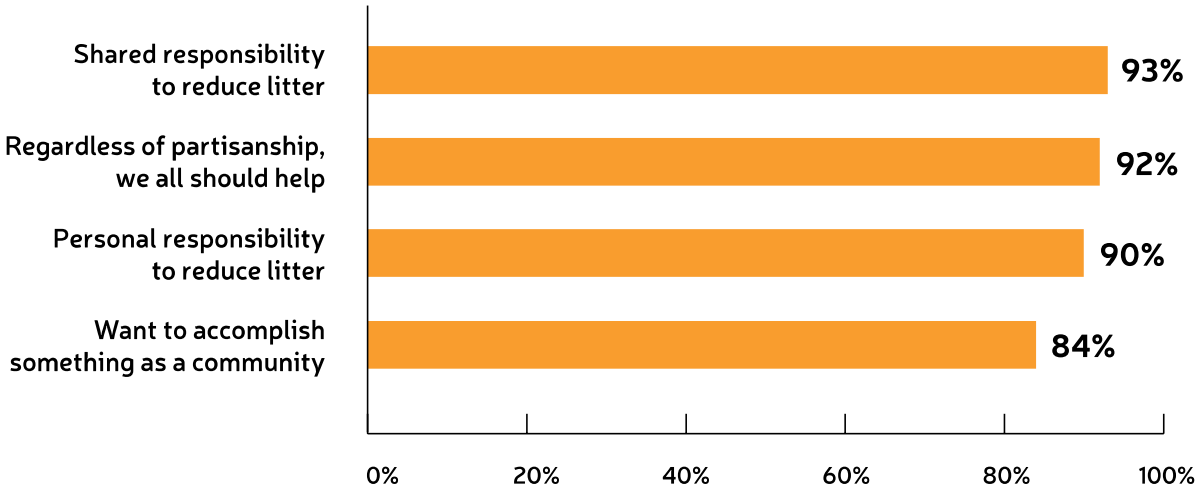


Figure 5: Americans agree they have a role to play



Data Insights

COASTAL LITTER: AN URGENT NEW CHALLENGE

While extensive research has documented the dangers of coastal litter, the Study provides the first national estimate of coastal litter, revealing a challenge that differs markedly from conditions along roadways and waterways.

Even as litter levels along roadways and surface waterways have declined, coastal litter density is dramatically higher. Coastal environments average 16,800 litter items per mile, compared with 2,200 items per mile on roadways and 1,300 items per mile on surface waterways, meaning **coastal areas contain 8 to 13 times more litter per mile than inland environments** (see table below).

Importantly, the greatest concentrations of coastal litter are not found on beaches, where volunteer cleanups and public attention are typically focused, but in vegetated coastal areas such as mangroves, salt marshes, and other shoreline vegetation. These environments make up 74% of the U.S. coastline and host some of the highest litter densities observed in the Study—**more than 20,000 pieces per mile, exceeded only by tidal flats.** By contrast, beaches account for just 9% of the coastline and exhibit a distinctly different litter profile. Along beaches, recreation related plastic products dominate (65% of littered products), while in vegetated areas, glass is the dominant material, and plastic (31%) represents less than half the share of litter found on beaches.

These findings have important implications for how coastal litter is addressed. Current strategies that focus heavily on beach cleanups and other public facing coastal spaces capture only a narrow slice of the overall problem. Litter estimates and prevention efforts centered on beaches alone can offer an incomplete—and sometimes misleading—picture, substantially under-representing conditions in vegetated and other coastal zones. Moreover, the types of litter commonly found on beaches, often associated with recreation, do not reflect the broader composition of litter found across society.

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Coastal litter also differs in scale and composition. **More than 90% of litter found along coastlines measures less than four inches, an even higher share than on roadways or waterways.** These small fragments—including plastic pieces, films, foams, and fibers—are especially difficult to remove and can cause significant harm to coastal ecosystems, wildlife, and water quality.

The takeaway is clear: coastal litter requires a more tailored and innovative approach. The diversity of coastal environments, **the concentration of litter in vegetated areas, and the dominance of small, hard to collect items all point to the need for more adaptable mitigation strategies**. These may include partnerships with coastal landowners, targeted education, advanced litter interception technologies, specialized cleanup methods, and stronger upstream prevention measures.

However, the decrease in litter along roadways and waterways also provide positive lessons as we address litter in coastal environments, emerging product trends, and persistent behavioral drivers. The challenge is not insurmountable. **The Study tells us that coordinated policy, infrastructure improvements, behavioral interventions, and community engagement can dramatically reduce litter.** Success will depend on sustained efforts, adaptive strategies, and recognition that the litter problem looks quite different depending on whether you stand along a busy highway, beside a creek, or deep within a salt marsh.

LITTER PER MILE ON ROADWAYS, WATERWAYS, AND COASTAL AREAS

	ROADWAY	WATERWAY	COASTAL
Total Litter Items	18,403,372,900	14,203,486,900	2,388,099,800
Total Miles	8,351,057	10,928,632	142,114
Items per Mile	2,204	1,300	16,804

Keep America Beautiful: Our Model for Change

Decades of coordinated action by consumers, communities, businesses, and organizations have contributed to the progress we see in litter. Keep America Beautiful has been a key driver, leveraging its national network, behavior change expertise, and research partnerships to advance targeted interventions. **Our Model for Change emphasizes three core strategies:**

- **Cleaning and maintaining public spaces.**
- **Providing appropriate and accessible disposal infrastructure and services.**
- **Delivering clear, task-specific messaging to influence behavior at the point of disposal.**

A prominent example of this approach is the **Cigarette Litter Prevention and Recycling (CLPR) program**, through which participating communities achieve an average **50% reduction in cigarette butt litter.** These results demonstrate that focused, evidence-based programs can produce meaningful and measurable impacts, even for highly persistent litter items.

However, the continued presence of cigarette butts at such large scale underscores an important reality: while progress has been significant, the problem is not yet solved. Cigarette butts remain a dominant element of the litter stream due to their small size, ubiquity, and improper disposal habits. **Sustaining and expanding proven interventions—and developing new strategies where needed—will be essential to further reducing** cigarette butt litter and, critically, can be applied to new and increasing litter products and problems.

Data Insights

SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The Study confirms that focused, evidence-based approaches to litter prevention are making a real difference. To ensure these gains continue—and expand to match the scale of the problem—**ongoing attention to education, access to infrastructure and services, and collaboration will be essential.**

As discussed above, the Keep America Beautiful Model for Change provides a framework for addressing litter problems across all types of communities, environments, and for many challenging products. This model engages people at every stage of community improvement and has consistently delivered sustainable, long lasting results. Through programs implemented across the Keep America Beautiful network, local affiliates demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach in achieving measurable, community-wide impact.

Despite the proven effectiveness of this framework, the Study makes clear that **gaps remain in both public education and access to disposal infrastructure** and services. Americans are not being reached sufficiently by litter prevention education: only about one in three (31%) recalls seeing or hearing an advertisement about litter prevention in their state (Figure 7). This shortfall limits awareness, weakens social norms, and constrains the reach of effective prevention strategies.

However, even with positive intentions, littering persists as a "crime of inconvenience." **Respondents acknowledge that when trash and recycling options are inconvenient or unavailable, people are more likely to make improper disposal choices** (Figure 8). Education plays a vital role in developing consistent norms as well as ensuring people understand the effects of litter and the shared responsibility to prevent it, while accessible infrastructure makes proper disposal an easy choice.

Addressing litter at scale also requires active engagement from businesses and producers, whose decisions influence product design, packaging, material choices, and the systems that support reuse, recycling, and proper disposal. **Collaboration with the private sector is essential to reducing litter upstream**, strengthening recovery systems, and aligning incentives across the value chain.

Taken together, the findings show that current approaches—public education, accessible disposal infrastructure and services, and cross-sector engagement—are delivering measurable results and contributing to meaningful reductions in litter. However, with an estimated 35 billion pieces of litter still present nationwide, these solutions need to be expanded to keep pace with the scale of the problem. **The Study shows that Americans care about litter and are ready to collaborate with local government, organizations, and companies to make their communities clean, beautiful, and vibrant places to live.**

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Figure 7: Americans who have seen or heard litter prevention ads

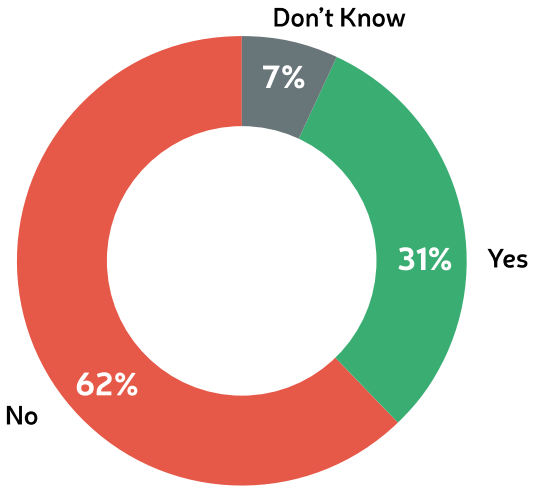
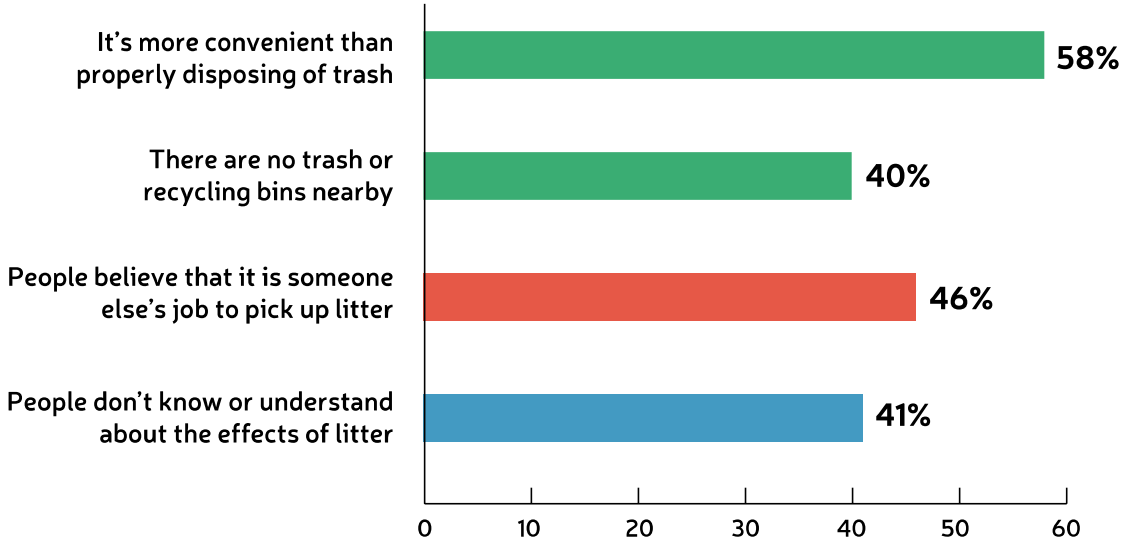
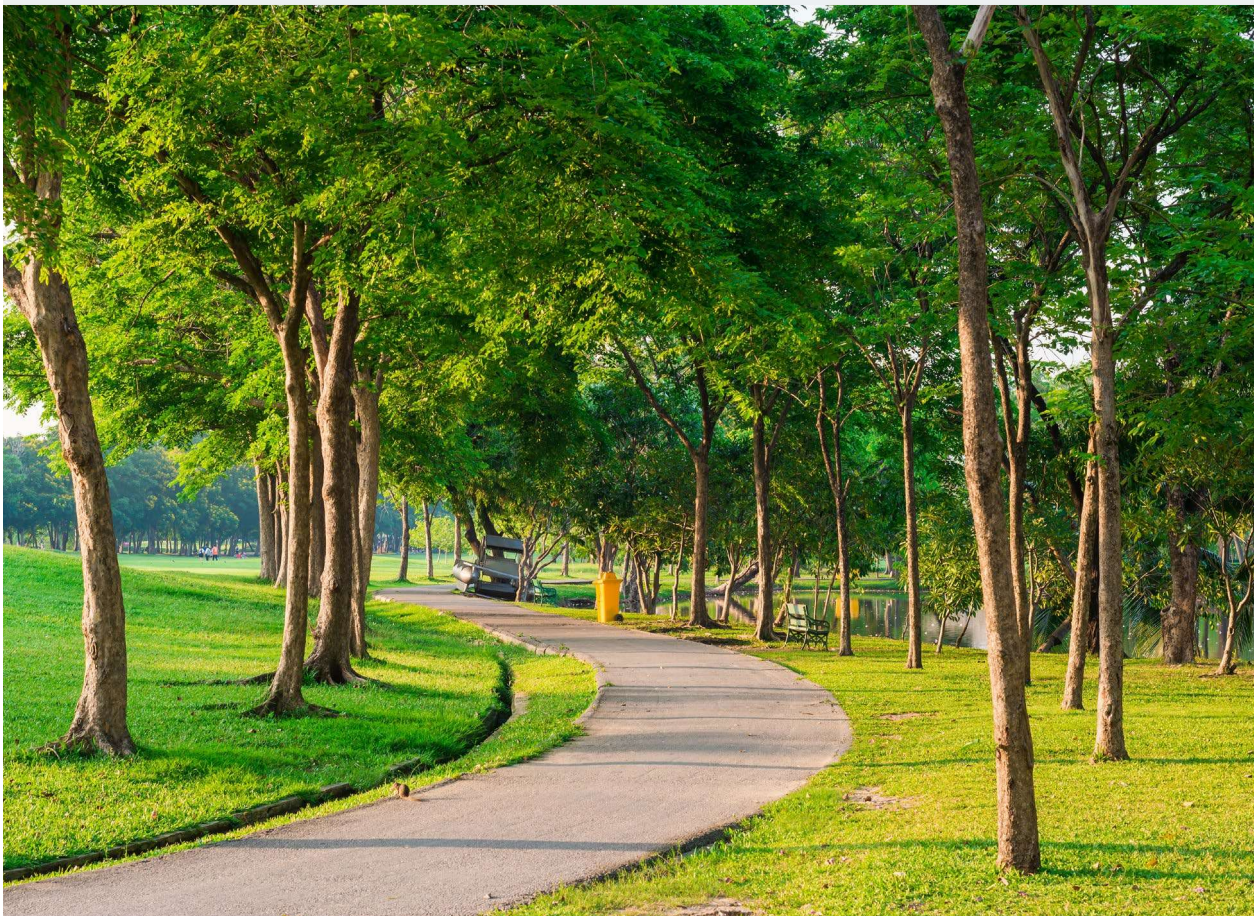


Figure 8: Why Americans litter



Closing Thoughts

The findings of the Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study present both a clear mandate and a clear opportunity. Proven strategies are working, but must be strengthened, expanded, and matched to the scale of a challenge that still leaves 35 billion pieces of litter across the nation. Sustained progress will depend on continued investment in education, infrastructure, and behavior change strategies; deeper engagement from businesses and producers to reduce litter upstream; and ongoing collaboration among communities, governments, and individuals. Litter is not inevitable, nor is progress assured. What happens next depends on collective action and sustained commitment. By accelerating what works and closing the gaps that remain, the nation can turn measurable progress into lasting change—and ensure that cleaner, healthier, more vibrant communities become the norm, not the exception.



Appendix

Table 1: List of Visible Litter Study Materials and Products

A comprehensive list of the littered items we tracked for the 2026 National Litter Study.

PAPER	Fast-food paper bags	Office paper/ mail
	Fast-food paper cups	Newspaper/ inserts
	Other paper fast-food service items	Magazines
	Cardboard	Books
	Kraft bags	Aseptic/ gable top containers
	Receipts	Beverage carriers/ cartons
	Political signs	Paper home food packaging
	Other advertising signs	Wine or liquor container
	Other cup	Napkin
	Other paper	
PLASTIC	Soda	Utensil
	Single-serve wine & liquor	Plastic trash bags
	Other wine & liquor	Other plastic bags
	Sports & energy drinks	Food-packaging film
	Juice	Other film
	Tea & coffee	Other fast food service items
	Still water	Expanded polystyrene food service items
	Other water	Other expanded polystyrene
	Other plastic beverage bottles	Other expanded plastic
	Fast-food plastic cups	Other plastic food packaging
	Other jug or container	Buoy or float
	Loose cap	Fishing line or lure
	Loose tab	Rope or net
	Beverage ring	Personal care product
	Straw or stirrer	Other plastic
	Other beverage packaging	
METAL	Beer	Other beverage bottles
	Soda	Loose cap
	Other wine or liquor	Loose tab
	Hard seltzer and pre-mixed cocktails	Other beverage packaging
	Sports & energy drinks	Aerosol can
	Juice	Other food packaging
	Tea & coffee	Other metal

Appendix

GLASS	Beer	Tea & coffee
	Soda	Still water
	Single-serve wine & liquor	Other water
	Other wine & liquor	Other glass beverage bottles
	Hard seltzer and pre-mixed cocktails	Broken glass or ceramic
	Sports & energy drinks	Other glass food packaging
	Juice	Other glass
ORGANICS	Pet waste	Other food waste
	Human waste	Other organics
	Confection	
SMOKING OR TOBACCO	Cigarette butt	Smokeless tobacco pouch
	Electronic cigarettes cartridge	Disposable lighter
	Other electronic cigarettes related product	Other smokeless tobacco-related product or packaging
	Cigar tip	Other smoking or tobacco
TIRES & VEHICLE DEBRIS	Vehicle debris	Tire tread
	Tire	
TEXTILES	Clothing or shoe	Natural fiber rope or net
	Towel or rag	Other textile
OTHER	Medical waste	Personal sanitary product
	PPE gloves	Entertainment items
	PPE masks	Flat screen TVs and computer monitors
	Hazardous waste	CRT televisions and computer monitors
	Construction and demolition debris	Portable electronics
	Other camping item	Electronic cords
	Bulky items	Other electronics
	Balloon	Other items
	Explosive	

Appendix

Table 2: Litter Composition Counts by Roadway, Waterway, and Coastal Areas

Litter Material Type	Litter Product Type	Roadway	Waterway	Coastal	Total
Paper	**Wine or liquor container**	853,200	8,552,400	0	9,405,600
Paper	**Fast food bag**	66,101,200	19,602,100	214,800	85,918,100
Paper	**Fast food cup (Paper)**	22,952,400	13,803,300	618,600	37,374,300
Paper	**Other cup**	8,036,700	32,259,000	0	40,295,700
Paper	**Napkin**	585,841,900	310,765,900	17,460,200	914,068,000
Paper	**Other fast food service item (Paper)**	373,585,300	13,042,300	12,989,700	399,617,300
Paper	**Cardboard**	266,246,400	84,957,600	3,837,700	355,041,700
Paper	**Kraft bag**	21,682,400	383,200	3,205,300	25,270,900
Paper	**Receipt**	67,929,000	254,856,800	4,005,300	326,791,100
Paper	**Political sign**	601,100	0	0	601,100
Paper	**Other advertising sign**	9,043,200	13,591,100	1,519,700	24,154,000
Paper	**Office paper / mail**	507,684,200	287,420,600	3,019,900	798,124,700
Paper	**Newspaper / insert**	10,725,700	86,848,600	487,200	98,061,500
Paper	**Magazine**	2,060,800	211,300	0	2,272,100
Paper	**Book**	5,247,600	902,900	0	6,150,500
Paper	**Aseptic / gable top container**	2,375,600	10,644,700	105,500	13,125,800
Paper	**Beverage carrier / carton**	1,934,400	7,191,600	376,700	9,502,700
Paper	**Home food packaging**	266,652,900	113,653,700	6,213,900	386,520,500
Paper	**Other (Paper)**	366,805,200	241,486,800	10,520,200	618,812,200
Paper	**Subtotal**	**2,586,359,200**	**1,500,173,900**	**64,574,700**	**4,151,107,800**
Plastic	**Soda (Plastic)**	22,110,900	40,607,000	3,691,900	66,409,800
Plastic	**Single serve wine or liquor (Plastic)**	72,176,300	132,774,600	16,919,900	221,870,800
Plastic	**Other wine or liquor (Plastic)**	11,400,700	1,774,700	0	13,175,400
Plastic	**Other (Plastic)**	1,257,274,700	531,532,100	197,229,600	1,986,036,400
Plastic	**Sports or energy drink (Plastic)**	20,227,900	15,865,000	3,276,500	39,369,400
Plastic	**Juice (Plastic)**	7,743,200	11,670,500	4,214,600	23,628,300
Plastic	**Tea or coffee (Plastic)**	16,363,500	2,656,800	906,000	19,926,300
Plastic	**Still water (Plastic)**	148,871,200	185,871,600	17,783,100	352,525,900
Plastic	**Other water (Plastic)**	17,516,800	71,053,400	33,700	88,603,900
Plastic	**Other beverage bottle (Plastic)**	118,185,400	46,410,100	3,205,300	167,800,800
Plastic	**Other jug or container**	75,520,200	86,930,900	7,739,400	170,190,500

Appendix

Litter Material Type	Litter Product Type	Roadway	Waterway	Coastal	Total
Plastic	**Loose cap (Plastic)**	260,437,300	390,117,000	87,757,200	738,311,500
Plastic	**Loose tab (Plastic)**	105,200,900	72,825,100	6,170,900	184,196,900
Plastic	**Fast food cup (Plastic)**	150,731,500	22,976,700	2,589,300	176,297,500
Plastic	**Straw or stirrer**	187,460,700	35,161,100	29,746,000	252,367,800
Plastic	**Beverage ring**	12,772,500	6,278,200	12,869,600	31,920,300
Plastic	**Other beverage packaging (Plastic)**	151,561,500	288,470,300	41,974,900	482,006,700
Plastic	**Trash bag**	32,042,500	145,276,100	6,545,400	183,864,000
Plastic	**Other bag**	107,613,100	307,075,300	10,386,500	425,074,900
Plastic	**Food packaging film**	1,371,888,800	992,646,800	100,957,000	2,465,492,600
Plastic	**Other film**	885,745,700	1,139,516,700	79,617,200	2,104,879,600
Plastic	**Utensil**	45,173,000	10,658,500	6,832,400	62,663,900
Plastic	**Other fast food service item (Plastic)**	43,535,500	184,347,200	8,248,200	236,130,900
Plastic	**Expanded polystyrene food service item**	155,436,600	59,307,100	40,764,300	255,508,000
Plastic	**Other expanded polystyrene**	1,676,646,600	1,179,472,700	23,420,400	2,879,539,700
Plastic	**Other expanded plastic**	144,153,200	46,088,200	15,208,900	205,450,300
Plastic	**Other food packaging (Plastic)**	192,490,100	135,789,500	11,036,200	339,315,800
Plastic	**Buoy or Float**	0	29,171,400	1,443,700	30,615,100
Plastic	**Fishing line or lure**	0	946,825,200	22,434,500	969,259,700
Plastic	**Rope or net**	23,397,400	19,411,400	9,250,000	52,058,800
Plastic	**Personal care product**	118,998,700	27,616,200	8,527,100	155,142,000
Plastic	**Subtotal**	**7,432,676,400**	**7,166,177,400**	**780,779,700**	**15,379,633,500**
Metal	**Beer (Metal)**	204,891,000	370,947,600	8,555,900	584,394,500
Metal	**Soda (Metal)**	159,556,400	126,633,500	8,709,900	294,899,800
Metal	**Other wine or liquor (Metal)**	3,439,000	8,689,600	871,000	12,999,600
Metal	**Hard seltzer and pre-mixed cocktails (Metal)**	21,857,700	4,445,400	1,810,700	28,113,800
Metal	**Sports or energy drink (Metal)**	48,482,800	137,997,200	545,600	187,025,600
Metal	**Juice (Metal)**	3,059,600	6,362,000	0	9,421,600
Metal	**Tea or coffee (Metal)**	4,601,300	27,142,500	0	31,743,800
Metal	**Other beverage bottle (Metal)**	54,256,500	20,959,000	63,900	75,279,400
Metal	**Loose cap (Metal)**	44,248,000	44,321,200	8,358,400	96,927,600
Metal	**Loose tab (Metal)**	111,127,400	16,821,400	34,400,400	162,349,200
Metal	**Other beverage packaging (Metal)**	6,863,900	0	2,959,100	9,823,000
Metal	**Aerosol can**	50,904,800	2,981,100	323,500	54,209,400

Appendix

Litter Material Type	Litter Product Type	Roadway	Waterway	Coastal	Total
Metal	**Other food packaging (Metal)**	357,248,800	90,996,400	7,844,500	456,089,700
Metal	**Other (Metal)**	325,885,400	490,176,500	5,959,800	822,021,700
Metal	**Subtotal**	**1,396,422,600**	**1,348,473,400**	**80,402,700**	**2,825,298,700**
Glass	**Beer (Glass)**	173,477,100	536,787,100	8,592,900	718,857,100
Glass	**Soda (Glass)**	7,209,100	5,634,800	0	12,843,900
Glass	**Single serve wine or liquor (Glass)**	51,327,400	45,100	0	51,372,500
Glass	**Other wine or liquor (Glass)**	4,905,500	10,772,500	302,000	15,980,000
Glass	**Hard seltzer and pre-mixed cocktails (Glass)**	45,100	1,523,700	266,000	1,834,800
Glass	**Sports or energy drink (Glass)**	0	0	0	0
Glass	**Juice (Glass)**	125,200	6,181,200	0	6,306,400
Glass	**Tea or coffee (Glass)**	2,354,000	0	0	2,354,000
Glass	**Still water (Glass)**	20,400	0	0	20,400
Glass	**Other water (Glass)**	0	0	0	0
Glass	**Other beverage bottle (Glass)**	14,002,000	40,150,500	0	54,152,500
Glass	**Broken glass or ceramic**	358,639,100	1,108,585,000	1,211,123,000	2,678,347,100
Glass	**Other food packaging (Glass)**	0	242,200	0	242,200
Glass	**Other (Glass)**	30,610,800	2,395,800	124,200	33,130,800
Glass	**Subtotal**	**642,715,700**	**1,712,317,900**	**1,220,408,100**	**3,575,441,700**
Organic	**Pet waste**	45,386,800	78,708,000	4,164,400	128,259,200
Organic	**Human waste**	5,084,700	1,361,400	290,300	6,736,400
Organic	**Confection**	0	0	0	0
Organic	**Other food waste**	57,947,100	70,811,500	20,977,200	149,735,800
Organic	**Other (Organic)**	16,987,700	22,566,300	3,941,000	43,495,000
Organic	**Subtotal**	**125,406,300**	**173,447,200**	**29,372,900**	**328,226,400**
Smoking or Tobacco	**Cigarette butt**	3,152,345,500	535,519,300	91,691,400	3,779,556,200
Smoking or Tobacco	**Electronic cigarettes cartridge**	4,709,800	13,366,800	0	18,076,600
Smoking or Tobacco	**Other electronic cigarettes related product**	2,143,300	28,810,300	5,000	30,958,600
Smoking or Tobacco	**Cigar tip**	24,872,100	2,336,100	16,508,300	43,716,500
Smoking or Tobacco	**Smokeless tobacco pouch**	2,055,500	6,894,600	2,903,300	11,853,400
Smoking or Tobacco	**Other smokeless tobacco-related product or packaging**	23,729,200	24,605,400	881,800	49,216,400
Smoking or Tobacco	**Disposable lighter**	23,591,000	2,335,000	3,953,000	29,879,000

Appendix

Litter Material Type	Litter Product Type	Roadway	Waterway	Coastal	Total
Smoking or Tobacco	**Other (Smoking or Tobacco)**	29,022,100	49,337,900	1,407,800	79,767,800
Smoking or Tobacco	**Subtotal**	**3,262,468,500**	**663,205,400**	**117,350,600**	**4,043,024,500**
Tires and Vehicle Debris	**Vehicle debris**	839,622,000	216,513,600	98,300	1,056,233,900
Tires and Vehicle Debris	**Tire**	118,988,700	3,964,900	376,700	123,330,300
Tires and Vehicle Debris	**Tire tread**	599,564,900	70,467,400	99,000	670,131,300
Tires and Vehicle Debris	**Subtotal**	**1,558,175,600**	**290,945,900**	**574,000**	**1,849,695,500**
Textile	**Clothing or shoe**	35,784,400	165,130,100	9,807,000	210,721,500
Textile	**Towel or rag**	43,713,200	48,133,200	2,749,300	94,595,700
Textile	**Natural fiber rope or net**	81,622,200	210,767,600	10,621,500	303,011,300
Textile	**Other (Textile)**	112,783,500	111,694,800	6,674,700	231,153,000
Textile	**Subtotal**	**273,903,300**	**535,725,700**	**29,852,500**	**839,481,500**
Other	**Hazardous waste**	19,200,100	26,200	0	19,226,300
Other	**Medical waste**	7,191,000	9,420,400	3,602,000	20,213,400
Other	**PPE Glove**	38,401,200	3,923,300	3,982,800	46,307,300
Other	**PPE Mask**	1,047,700	5,610,900	0	6,658,600
Other	**Construction or demolition debris**	555,581,400	277,547,300	24,361,500	857,490,200
Other	**Other camping item**	29,597,500	5,855,800	981,800	36,435,100
Other	**Bulky item**	1,757,600	13,235,200	604,000	15,596,800
Other	**Balloon**	52,777,300	5,706,400	0	58,483,700
Other	**Explosive**	7,071,100	7,801,400	6,614,900	21,487,400
Other	**Personal sanitary product**	5,323,700	1,412,400	2,093,700	8,829,800
Other	**Entertainment item**	8,125,000	44,675,800	1,636,700	54,437,500
Other	**Flat-Screen TV or Computer Monitor**	0	0	0	0
Other	**CRT TV or computer monitor**	0	0	0	0
Other	**Portable electronic**	206,500	0	0	206,500
Other	**Electronic cord**	19,016,800	5,945,000	4,193,700	29,155,500
Other	**Other electronic**	33,401,200	7,138,500	796,500	41,336,200
Other	**Other (Other)**	346,547,200	424,721,500	15,917,000	787,185,700
Other	**Subtotal**	**1,125,245,300**	**813,020,100**	**64,784,600**	**2,003,050,000**
	Total	**18,403,372,900**	**14,203,486,900**	**2,388,099,800**	**34,994,959,600**

Acknowledgments

The Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study was made possible by the donations and support of many individual Americans and the following organizations who are Keep America Beautiful partners in ending litter:

Citation

Keep America Beautiful. *Keep America Beautiful 2026 National Litter Study Summary Report.*

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