

AN ANTI-LITTER CAMPAIGN REDUCES MAINTENANCE

John E. Clark

Chairman, Governor's Committee to Keep Maryland Beautiful

Litter is waste—wasted highway maintenance dollars and wasted highway beauty. An approximate cost of cleanup for the nation's primary highways alone amounts to the staggering sum of \$50,000,000—fifty million tax dollars of man-hours and truck hours needlessly used cleaning the rights-of-way of trash, paper, bottles and cans. The cost of litter is measured not just in dollars and cents but, tragically, in human lives, as well. A reliable source estimates that 1,000 Americans are needlessly killed (accounting for $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the 40,000 yearly highway deaths) and nearly 100,000 are seriously injured each year as a result of cars striking, or swerving to avoid, objects left on the highways. There is still another litter cost—seemingly intangible, perhaps, and yet, when measured in human values, very real and that is the wanton destruction of the beauty of the American countryside and its contribution to the health, well-being and enjoyment of the people.

The wide open spaces are constantly narrowing as the countryside becomes ever more and more thickly ribboned with asphalt and concrete; as each small crossroad becomes a village, each village a town, each town a metropolis. No longer are there new frontiers to occupy and squander, at least not within the United States. Today there are fewer fields, streams, and woodlands per person than yesterday, and tomorrow holds even less of the outdoors for each person to enjoy. In 1957, 171,000,000 people in the United States shared the outdoors, and in 1975 a probable 50,000,000 more will share it. If, because of this increase in population, there is a corresponding increase in litter, with less space in which to throw it, the cost of maintenance to keep removing this blight-like carpet of debris from the highways will be even more prohibitive than it is now, and the cost to human enjoyment of the outdoors will likewise be dealt a serious blow. It is hoped and believed that this will not happen—it is not proposed to let it happen.

Already, in many places the litter tide is being reversed, because people are doing something about it.

On the national level, five years ago Keep America Beautiful, Inc., was organized by civic leaders, and backed financially by American business and industry. Since then, citizens in small communities and large cities throughout the nation have organized to tackle the litter problem in their own particular areas. Litter exists all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It can be eliminated in each community only by those who live there, because it takes everybody everywhere to get the job done.

Littered highways and littered communities are an insult to the pride of the people's natural heritage. No one can possibly dispute the statement that everything clean looks lovelier.

Littered highways are not caused by natural litter but by the people who throw litter. The solution is not in more efficient cleanup equipment or greater manpower to pick up the litter faster. This merely increases maintenance costs. The answer is simpler. Trash, papers, bottles and cans must not reach the highways, sidewalks, and countryside. This can be accomplished when each individual assumes the responsibility for proper disposal of trash.

An anti-litter campaign is one of educating citizens to their responsibility in properly disposing of their trash. Its result is an increased pride in, and appreciation of, the outdoors; its by-product is a reduction in maintenance costs. For example, on 583 mi of test highway in Maryland, statistics show a 33 1/3 percent decrease in the amount of litter in 1958 as compared with 1957. This is reflected in a decreased cost of tax dollars, from \$25,626 in 1957 to \$17,662.54 in 1958, a saving of 31 percent.

Reports from other states confirm that anti-litter campaigns pay off. Washington State reports 30 percent less litter in 1957 than before its anti-litter campaign; in Ohio cleanup costs were reduced by over \$350,000 in three years.

What is an anti-litter campaign? How does it work? What are its objectives? First of all, the word "campaign" may be misleading. It is not a short-term, all-out one-week or even one-month drive, but must be a continuous 52-week year-round program. It cannot be attacked from one angle alone. The highway litter problem cannot be solved by itself, but must take its place in the over-all litter picture. People create litter on the city streets, in parks, in public office buildings, at local fairs, at major sports events, and on highways. When people have been taught to use the sidewalk trash containers, the trash cans in the parks, the ash trays and containers in the public office buildings and at fairs and major sports events, then they have been taught to respect the cleanliness of highways.

With this in mind, the highway litter problem and the particular weapons with which to fight it are analyzed. Basically, litter has four classifications:

1. The individual items tossed out car windows.
2. The debris carelessly left in roadside rest areas and other pull-offs.
3. Household garbage consciously dumped there.
4. Improperly covered vehicles.

How is this problem attacked? How is each citizen made to realize and accept responsibility in the stewardship of this common property? First of all, there is the sight and sound method. Through radio, TV, newspapers, motion picture theatres, magazines and person-to-person approaches, Keep America Beautiful exhortations are being seen and heard.

Many people need no more than this—the definition of the problem and advice as to their part in its solution—to correct their habits, to turn the unconscious habit of unclasping the hand with whatever is in it, at any place, at any time, to a conscious habit of placing whatever they wish to dispose of in its proper place.

The majority of people litter carelessly as a matter of unconscious habit. As with all bad habits, it takes constant 100 percent consciousness of it in order to eliminate it. Often, people will classify bottles and cans as litter, but will forget the empty cigarette pack, or fail to realize that trash thrown into small bodies of water washes ashore to litter beaches.

The cure for the litter that is on the highways, in the parks and public areas is in the prevention of its being there. One of the surest methods for accomplishing this is to provide proper places to deposit this litter. Cleanup programs, backed by strict law enforcement, are effective. The provision of proper trash disposal facilities, from a litterbag in the car to adequate household garbage outlets, is necessary.

In the maintenance of clean highways, there are three key groups who can influence—forcefully, if necessary—the rest of the public in keeping the highways clean. The first group is the one which maintains the roads; the second, the police;

and the third, private business and property owners adjacent to the highways.

The State Roads Commission which maintains the state highways of Maryland, traces its role from a passive one to one of real leadership in the state program. At the outset of the Keep Maryland Beautiful activities, frequent complaints were received about SRC personnel leaving lunch debris scattered on the roadsides. This is no longer true. The State Roads personnel are keenly aware of their personal responsibility regarding the litter problem, not only in taking care of their own trash, but doing extra cleanup work during their regular road maintenance. This laudable result has come about through an educational program within the Commission itself, by means of articles about Keep Maryland Beautiful in their newsletters, a direct letter, enclosing a litterbag, from the Chairman of the Commission to each employee, and the general acceptance of, and pride in, their role of keeping Maryland highways litter-free.

In the beginning of the program, there was not much emphasis or money spent on highway cleanup. Many district engineers had no item in the budget for cleanup; on many roads litter was not picked up from year to year. As the KMB program got under way and public opinion mounted against littered highways, the Commission responded by spending more time and more money on cleanup. This resulted in an alarming increase in the cost of maintenance. However, an axiom fundamental to the program was realized—clean highways and clean picnic areas perpetuate their cleanliness. Start a molehill of litter and there is soon a mountain—litter attracts more litter. Human weakness prevails—"a little more won't matter." Therefore, after the Commission had increased its efforts to clean up, it was found there was increasingly less to clean up. The 33 1/3 percent less litter this year proves this point.

The second key group in maintaining clean highways is the police, or other authority which is empowered to enforce the anti-litter laws. (Forty-eight states have anti-litter laws, with varying fines of from \$1 to \$1,000.) Laws are enforced to whatever degree the majority of the public wishes them enforced, especially in matters that are basically a matter of human conduct, such as litter violations. Where the majority of people realize that littering and good manners are contradictory, the small minority that wilfully violates the law will be forced to conform. In Maryland, local enforcement varies from community to community, according to the general attitude. Where the public's opinion has been conditioned by cleanup and beautification campaigns, where individuals are quick to call the police and stand behind their accusations, the police are equally quick to apprehend violators, and the magistrates to level fines and deal out punishment.

In Maryland the Superintendent of State Police has personally taken a strong stand in the program, and has provided litterbags for all patrol cars. The posting of KMB litter penalty signs by the State Roads Commission at 10-mi intervals on all major state highways has been helpful as a reminder to thoughtless violators and a warning to wilful ones. Nationally, it has been found that the most effective signs are those which have a terse message stating the fine.

The third key group is composed of roadside businesses which cater to the motor-ing public, and landowners adjacent to the highways. Potential litter emanates from every roadside business place where the motorist buys something in a container. This is the main reason why non-access and limited-access highways have less litter compared with roads lined with ribbon development. The roadside business places have a two-fold part in combating litter—the maintenance of clean premises and provision of adequate trash containers for public use. Because clean, attractive looking places attract customers, proprietors should be eager to cooperate in all-out cleanliness programs. Drive-ins should be equipped with clean, attractively

painted and appropriately labeled containers. Service stations should be equipped with travel trash receptacles. Many Maryland service stations are providing paper litterbags free of charge, or are selling one of a variety of plastic containers now on the market. The cooperation of the public is made easy when they travel on clean highways and are afforded adequate facilities for the convenient disposal of travel trash.

Throughout the country, the word "litterbag" is becoming a familiar term, and some type of litter container is either a fixture in the family car or a necessary traveling companion on any family trip. Motorists are constantly urged: "Don't be a litterbug—be a litter-bagger!"

It has been established that trash containers in various forms are imperative for clean highways. (This is true for any litter situation, in parks, along sidewalks, at public gatherings and in office buildings.) However, Maryland differs on one major point from the approach taken by some states in the way of placing containers along the highways. These states are using big trash barrels, usually 55-gallon oil drums, at intervals along the highways, often with little or no pull-off areas. The containers are brightly painted and labeled, usually with warning signs posted well in advance. However, Maryland can state from experience in areas that are rapidly becoming urban, that these containers do not serve the purpose for which they were placed, but are merely depositories for local household garbage. This creates a situation which is not only a violation of the health laws, but puts whatever agency maintaining the roads into the garbage collection business. Then too, it is felt that the average motorist with a bit of travel trash to discard will not pull off a high-speed highway to put it in a roadside container. Moreover, the action of slowing down and pulling off the highway is a traffic hazard. However, when a driver stops to picnic, or to repair his car at a natural pull-off, or to refuel at a service station, these times furnish a convenient chance for him to dispose of his travel trash. Therefore, it is contended that all picnic areas and pull-offs should be equipped with attractively painted and labeled trash containers, which are serviced by the authority that maintains the roads. Service stations, drive-ins, motels, and other businesses that serve the motoring public should unquestionably be equipped with travel trash containers which they maintain and service themselves.

The two main causes of litter on highways have been considered, both of which involve thoughtlessness on the part of the motorist who tosses trash out the car window, or who leaves his picnic debris scattered on the ground. The third classification of highway litter is household garbage. This can be eliminated by the provision of an adequate public disposal system, a program of public education as to its proper use, and the strict enforcement of such use. The fourth main source of highway litter—improperly covered trucks, particularly those that carry refuse—must also be eliminated by education and law enforcement.

In summary, all citizens must be taught that highways are there for their proper use, not abuse.

One need not hesitate in stating positively that a continuous anti-litter educational program to develop good trash disposal habits on the part of each individual reduces highway maintenance. But something much more than a reduction in the amount of trash, paper, bottles and cans along highways is being accomplished. Citizens who participate in cleanup programs, who carry litterbags in their cars, appreciate not only the cleanliness of their highways and communities but enjoy their added beauty. From cleanup campaigns they enter into roadside and community beautification programs.

It is almost traditional, a matter of pride, as it were, that one tries to look one's best when company is coming. Company is always coming to the countryside—tourists are constantly driving through. It should be a matter of pride to every American to see to it personally that when company drives by his front door the visitor takes away a pleasant memory of cleanliness, neatness and order, rather than a distressing impression of littered disorder.

Cleanup programs are the first step toward the end result of developing citizens who appreciate and are willing to work for clean and beautiful surroundings.

These are neither new ideas nor new ideals. Long ago one of the greatest of great Americans, Abraham Lincoln, summed it up with: "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live in it so his place will be proud of him."

America, the beautiful, is the place in which we live. It is our country and it is our job—yours, mine, everybody's—to keep it clean. By keeping it clean we keep it beautiful.