



\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

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Government and Media Relations

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## **Washington's new litter prevention campaign asks drivers to secure their vehicle loads**

*State agencies work together to make Washington roads safer and litter free*

**OLYMPIA, Wash.** – Today, the Washington Department of Ecology launched a new statewide safety and litter prevention campaign with its partners from the Washington State Patrol, the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Washington Traffic Safety Commission. The We Keep Washington Litter Free campaign's first initiative focuses on alerting Washingtonians that unsecured vehicle loads are a safety hazard for drivers and a significant contributor to litter on state highways.

The safety and environmental impacts of unsecured loads carry heavy costs. Debris on highways cause about 300 traffic crashes and 30 injuries every year in Washington. More than 12 million pounds of litter ends up on Washington roadways and up to 40% - almost 5 million pounds - comes from unsecured cargo and debris blowing out of pickup truck beds.

"Every year, road debris contributes to an average of nearly 90,000 property-related crashes on U.S. roadways. More than 17,000 people are injured from those crashes and over 700 are fatal," said Sgt. Darren Wright, a public information officer with the Washington State Patrol. "These crashes are entirely preventable and the power to stop them is in the hands of Washington drivers."

The start of the We Keep Washington Litter Free campaign is timed with the [National Secure Your Load Day](#) on June 6, which commemorates people whose lives were impacted or taken by unsecured loads and encourages drivers to properly secure their loads every time they drive. As a part of the campaign, state troopers are conducting emphasis patrols across the state for four consecutive weekends, starting May 28 and ending June 20. Drivers should be aware that they will get pulled over and ticketed if they have not properly secured their loads in accordance with [state law](#). Fines for littering and unsecured loads range from \$50 to \$5,000. If an item falls out and causes bodily harm or property damage, the driver could also face gross misdemeanor charges and jail time.

"In 2020, Ecology-funded litter programs collected more than 4.5 million pounds of litter and cleaned nearly 22,000 miles of road statewide. That's a lot, but it's just a fraction of the total amount of litter that accumulates each year," said

Amber Smith, statewide litter prevention coordinator at Ecology. “Litter isn’t just ugly. It’s dangerous. Some litter contains harmful chemicals or causes physical injuries to wildlife, as well as people.”

Cargo nets are an easy and effective solution for securing many types of vehicle loads and preventing road hazards. Ecology is piloting cargo net giveaway events in Kitsap, Klickitat, Grant and Ferry counties in June. In addition, up to 50 statewide retail partners will promote load securing best practices and products throughout the campaign.

“We are asking drivers to secure their vehicle loads to save lives,” said Sgt. Wright. “All Washingtonians can make a difference by talking to their friends and loved ones about the risks of driving with an unsecured load.”

The We Keep Washington Litter Free campaign initially focuses on unsecured vehicle loads, but will address additional littering behaviors in the near future. Statewide advertising for the campaign runs through June 2021.

Members of the public can also lend a hand cleaning up roadside litter. WSDOT’s Adopt-a-Highway volunteer program recently re-started after being paused during the pandemic for safety reasons. Anyone interested in joining can learn more on the [Adopt-a-Highway program webpage](#).

#### **More information**

- Call 911 if you see a dangerous unsecured load or something fall from a vehicle.
- [Adopt a Highway through Washington Department of Transportation to help make roads cleaner and safer.](#)
- [Learn more about Ecology’s litter pick up and prevention programs.](#)

#### **About the Washington Department of Ecology**

The mission of the [Department of Ecology](#) is to protect, preserve and enhance Washington’s environment and promote the wise management of our air, land and water for the benefit of current and future generations.

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#### **About the Washington State Patrol**

The [Washington State Patrol](#) is a premier law enforcement agency made up of dedicated professionals who work hard to improve the quality of life for motorists and prevent the unnecessary loss of life on a daily basis.

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#### **About the Washington State Department of Transportation**

The [Washington State Department of Transportation](#) is the steward of a multimodal transportation system and responsible for ensuring that people and goods move safely and efficiently. In addition to building, maintaining and operating the state highway system, WSDOT is responsible for the state ferry system, and works in partnership with others to maintain and improve local roads, railroads and airports, as well as to support alternatives to driving, such as public transportation, bicycles and pedestrian programs.

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#### **About the Washington Traffic Safety Commission**

The [Washington Traffic Safety Commission](#) (WTSC) is our state’s designated highway safety office. We share a vision with numerous other state and local public agencies. That vision is to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries to zero by 2030. The WTSC Director is the Governor’s Highway Safety Representative, which is a designated position each state is required to have in order to qualify for federal traffic safety funding.

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