

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Simple As That” campaign helps create a litter free Washington

Statewide litter prevention initiative encourages residents to take action to prevent litter on roads

OLYMPIA, Wash. – April is Earth Month, and the Washington Department of Ecology is marking the occasion with an emphasis on keeping Washington litter free. Roadside litter affects road safety, the environment and the wellbeing of local communities. More than 75% of Washington residents do not litter, but despite this, an estimated 26 million pounds of material still litter Washington’s roads every year.

Results from Ecology’s 2022 statewide litter study show there are 73,580 separate pieces of litter – or 1,579 pounds of trash – per mile per year on Washington’s interstate highways. Even on local roads, you can find 18,051 pieces of litter – 143 pounds – per mile per year. Common materials include plastic film packaging, food wrappers, cigarette butts, and beverage containers, all of which are not biodegradable and can leach harmful chemicals into the environment.

Why do people do it? Ecology’s research identified “not having a trash bag in the car” as a top reason why people litter.

Each year, the Washington State Department of Transportation and Ecology spend more than \$12 million combined to fund cleanup efforts. Pickup crews and volunteers collected more than 1,641 tons of garbage off state highways in 2022 alone, and that’s only a small fraction of waste that is tossed or blown out of a vehicle on to the road. Millions of pounds of litter are left behind.

Litter isn’t just unsightly, it can be dangerous and cause collisions. That’s why the Washington State Patrol educates and enforces litter laws, with fines ranging from \$103 to \$5,000. The largest fines are for “lit debris” — primarily cigarettes — and items that can lead to collisions.

“Everyone has a role to play in protecting and preserving the natural beauty of Washington,” said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. “Litter impacts our environment, wildlife, and public health and safety. Something as simple as throwing your trash away properly can make a big difference.”

Ecology’s [“Simple As That”](#) campaign is designed to reduce littering by changing the behaviors that cause it. The campaign gives people simple tips to avoid littering and motivates them to talk to their friends and family about living litter free. It encourages Washingtonians to:

- **Keep a litter bag in your car.** Use a litter bag while traveling to keep your vehicle tidy and reduce the chances of littering accidentally when you open a door or window. When visiting parks and other recreation areas, bring a bag with you so it’s easy to pack out what you packed in.
- **Hold on to trash from your travels until you reach your destination or a waste receptacle at a stop along the way.** It may not seem like a big deal to toss the occasional bag or bottle on the ground, but those decisions add up to millions of pounds of litter (and millions of dollars of clean up) every year in Washington.

- **Live litter free and help others do the same.** Make sure your friends and family know how to live litter free and help them make better choices. When we all look out for each other, it makes a big difference for our state.

As a part of the Earth Month campaign, Ecology is running statewide advertising in English and Spanish, distributing a [Litter Prevention Toolkit](#) to allied government agencies, jurisdictions, and nonprofit organizations, and partnering with Fred Meyer stores to give away free car litter bags to shoppers across the state.

Ecology also has a partnership with the [Refugee Artisan Initiative](#) to give away upcycled litter bags made from vinyl banners that would have otherwise gone to the landfill. These litter bags are made by refugee and immigrant women earning a living wage through the organization. Giveaways to local residents for the upcycled litter bags will take place at community events in the Spokane area in the last two weeks of April.

“This Earth Month, we want everyone to be part of the solution to keep Washington litter free by taking simple actions like holding on to trash until you see a bin or keeping a litter bag in your car,” said Laura Watson, Ecology’s director. “When you do your part, you set a good example for everyone else to do theirs.”

To learn more about this campaign, visit LitterFreeWA.org/simple or PorUnWAImpecable.org/simple.

More information

- To lend a hand cleaning up roadside litter, please visit WSDOT’s [Adopt-a-Highway volunteer program webpage](#).
- To learn more about Ecology’s litter pick up and prevention programs, please visit the [Litter in Washington webpage](#).

Media contacts

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