

# LITTER IN THE STORMWATER SYSTEM

The food wrapper, cigarette butt, plastic bottle or other trash that falls from your pocket or blows out of your vehicle will likely end up in the storm water system, going straight to our creeks, then rivers, and then the Atlantic Ocean.

According to Keep The Midlands Beautiful, motorists and pedestrians are often blamed for litter, but there are actually seven primary sources:

- Households, due to improper handling of trash and it's placement on the curb for collection
- Dumpsters used by businesses
- Loading docks
- Construction and demolition sites
- Trucks with unsecured loads
- Pedestrians
- Motorists

You may be surprised to learn that pedestrians and motorists account for less than half of all litter - the other five sources account for between 50-80%.

**Plastics: If you have heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch where plastic waste and other man-made marine debris accumulates, it's not the only one.**



There are five in all including one in the North Atlantic. When marine animals consume plastic trash, presumably mistaking it for food, it can lead to internal blockages, dehydration, starvation, and potentially death. Researchers are working to determine how PCBs, DDT and other chemicals in plastics may work their way up the food chain—perhaps even to humans.

Take a look around you - most of what we eat, drink, or use in any way comes packaged in petroleum plastic - a material designed to last forever, yet used for products that are meant to be thrown away.

Some plastics are labeled biodegradable. But chances are, that means that they will break down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic, but will never break down into a form that provides nutrients for the natural environment.

**Cigarette Butts: Tobacco products, mostly cigarette butts, are the most common form of litter on US roadways (38%). This is followed by paper (22%) and plastic (19%).**

The core of most cigarette filters - the part that looks like white cotton - is actually a form of plastic called cellulose acetate which is very slow to degrade in our environment. It can take 18 months to 10 years for a cigarette filter to decompose. Used cigarette filters are full of toxins which leach into the ground and waterways, damaging living organisms that contact them. A study conducted in 2000 estimated that 2.1 billion pounds of cigarette filters were discarded worldwide in 1998.



## **Cans, bottles, paper bags, Styrofoam take out containers, used condoms--you name it, manufactured products do not belong in our natural environment!**



Let's face it. We live in a disposable society. But that doesn't mean we should dispose of anything we want to in our environment. The main disposal option we have now is the landfill, so recycle when possible, and work hard to replace disposable items with reusable items like shopping bags and water bottles. Explore your options, but whatever you do, do not litter!

## **Even Worse! Large Litter And Dumping**

Unfortunately, some folks think that Gills Creek and its tributaries are a convenient place to dispose of tires, shopping carts, appliances, mattresses and other large objects.

Tires are built to handle extreme weather conditions and do not biodegrade, and provide a breeding spot for mosquitoes. Shopping carts are also built to last and in a waterway can trap debris and create blockages to water flow. Appliances, electronics and other consumer goods often contain hazardous waste that can harm the environment and have a potentially negative impact on human health.



## **Litter Clean Ups**

## **Keep The Midlands Beautiful Adopt-A-Highway/Adopt-A-Waterway**

Litter — a common source of pollution — threatens the health and beauty of far too many of our treasured lakes, streams and rivers. The Adopt-A-Waterway program offers volunteer groups the opportunity to address water-based litter issues in Richland and Lexington Counties. Please join

us in protecting and cleaning up our creeks, rivers, lakes, boat landings and islands.  
[Adopt-A-Waterway program...](#)

## **Beach Sweep / River Sweep**

Beach Sweep / River Sweep is organized by S.C. Sea Grant Consortium in partnership with S.C. Department of Natural Resources and is the largest one-day litter cleanup of South Carolina's beaches and waterways! Every third Saturday in September thousands of South Carolinians volunteer to clear trash from our beaches, rivers, lakes, marshes, and swamps.  
[SCDNR Beach Sweep/River Sweep sign up...](#)

Of course, it would be much better if our waterways did not need cleaning up!

## **Littering Is Against The Law**

- Fines can be as high as \$1,000.
- The court may impose litter-gathering hours, removal of all litter in the area and/or payment for damages.
- Even cigarettes and cigarette butts are considered to be litter.
- Authorities can confiscate vehicles used to dump large quantities of litter.
- Guilty convictions can lead to imprisonment for 30 days to one year.

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**For more information about the effects of litter and strategies for preventing it, see the following web sites:**

[PalmettoPride](#) - "PalmettoPride is a non-profit organization formed by a legislative initiative to fight litter and help beautify South Carolina. PalmettoPride is continually working towards a clean South Carolina through four main focus areas: education, enforcement, awareness and pickup."

[Keep The Midland Beautiful](#). - Information on litter prevention, Adopt-A-Highway and Adopt-A-Waterway programs.

[Keep America Beautiful](#) - "Keep America Beautiful follows a practical approach that unites citizens, businesses and government to find solutions that advance our core issues of preventing litter, reducing waste, and beautifying communities."

[EPA Marine Debris Prevention](#) Marine debris is a problem along shorelines, and in coastal waters, estuaries, and oceans throughout the world. Information on sources, impact, laws and regulations, and what you can do.