

# WHAT IS LITTER?



## KEY POINTS:

- o Litter is a constant but nevertheless controllable element in our society.
- o It is ugly waste generated through lazy, thoughtless or antisocial behaviour of people.
- o Such waste may present health or safety problems and is costly to recover.
- o Moves to ban or discriminate against packaging will not affect the majority of littered items.

Litter is controllable: for example Singapore which is considered by many to be the cleanest country in the world has managed to virtually eliminate litter. It is the method, means and cost of control that are at issue.

Cars aren't dumped or fruit peelings dropped of their own accord. Human behaviour is the litter culprit. Littering is an offence and it is anti-social. Casual dropping of peelings and packaging is more likely to be the result of careless or thoughtless behaviour.

Subsequent wind or rain intensifies the problem and leads to pollution of roads, waterways and other public places. Items of packaging - plastic, paper/board (includes junk mail etc) metal and glass - makes up about 53% of the total litter count.<sup>1</sup>

The good news is that 16 years ago it was 72% so people are doing better but there's a long way to go.<sup>2</sup>

This is not surprising as most packaging is light weight (paper and plastics) and it is its lightness and cheapness, generally considered a blessing in terms of waste minimisation and resource conservation, that makes it the ideal play-thing for wind and water. Thus packaging is much more likely to be prevalent in litter analyses such as those conducted by Clean Up Australia. Do an analysis your self and see what you discover.

There is no excuse for littering. Its clean up is a significant cost to local government. For example in NSW, it is estimated that councils spend annually over \$20 million on litter control and prevention.

Litter arises as a result of deliberate and careless human behaviour. It is also caused by preventable occurrences such as mishandled domestic, commercial and industrial refuse; poor loading or unloading of vehicles and uncovered or insecure loads. It is spread by wind, water, traffic, animals.

## The Control of Litter

Litter control is one area where the individual can actively make a positive difference to the environment. Clean Up Australia and Keep Australia Beautiful are instrumental in bringing about behavioural change and litter control but the community - the individual - must be behind any action to prevent and control litter. Remember packaging is not designed to litter.



<sup>1</sup> KESAB Environmental Solutions, Submission to Productivity Commission December 2005

<sup>2</sup> The Litter Stream - Content, Sources and Dynamics", KAB National Association Inc. (1993)