

"The High Cost of a Bad Habit!"

Defacing the beauty and resources of Iowa through the act of littering seems to be a growing habit. It represents a bad habit that costs Iowa taxpayers \$13.5 million dollars a year. The cost to the private sector may be of a similar magnitude. In the case of the private sector most of those dollars are spent in cleaning up after the litterer. Less than \$300,000 is spent on prevention efforts such as education, public awareness or enforcement. This is truly a case where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Keep Iowa Beautiful, a non-profit charitable organization initiated a series of three research studies to:

1. Better understand Iowan's attitudes on the issue of littering,
2. Find out what littering costs taxpayers and what preventive efforts are in place, and
3. Determine what and how much is being littered and where it is being done.

These three research projects represent benchmark information to determine what preventive efforts can be initiated that will change behavior patterns and to provide baseline information on the current level of littering.

The three studies represent the most comprehensive litter research undertaken by any state in the nation. They provide the information needed to develop an effective prevention program. They were structured and developed by a large group of public and business representatives.

Attitudinal Survey: Carried out by the Iowa Department of Transportation:

Process:

A detailed four page survey was randomly mailed to over 4,700 Iowans. The response rate was an unheard of 46.7% - truly an indication of the pride and commitment of Iowan's to the quality of Iowa.

Key Findings:

- Iowan's feel that throwing out a single item such as a candy wrapper or cigarette butt is not really littering.
- Enforcement of the law is a critical ingredient to changing behavior patterns.

Background Survey: Carried out by Franklin and Associates of Prairie Village, Kansas.

Process:

Surveys were mailed to city, county, schools, state government, federal government and all public entities. Basic intent was to determine the current level of expenditure for litter / illegal dumping clean up programs.

Key Findings:

- It costs taxpayers in Iowa 13.5 million dollars annually to clean up litter and illegal dumping within the State.
- Of that figure, less than \$300,000 was spent on litter prevention efforts (Education, public awareness and / or enforcement).

Physical Statewide Sampling of Litter: Carried out by Barker Lemar Engineering of Des Moines, Iowa.

Process:

150 roadway sites, both rural and urban were randomly selected. The 30' by 200 sites were identified and located with a global positioning system for the purpose of identifying those exact sites in the future for retesting. Every item of litter one half inch or larger was removed, identified by brand name (where possible) and categorized, counted, weighed, and measured for size.

Key Findings:

- 37% of the litter by item is cigarette related items.
- 42% of the litter by area is paper, plastics and food packaging items.
- The problem is largely an urban issue.

The full reports and summary report with recommendations is located on the Keep Iowa Beautiful web page - www.KeepIowaBeautiful.com.

It is clear that a significant effort will be required to change the habit and behavior pattern of Iowan's. The effort will require a mix of prevention efforts:

- Public education programs in our schools.
- Public awareness efforts to raise the understanding of the costs, impacts and penalties for littering.
- An increase in enforcement efforts to support the concept that littering is illegal and against the law.

Keep Iowa Beautiful challenges every Iowan to help us develop the plan that will eliminate the habit. Send us your ideas, ways, suggestions and thoughts. Include your ideas on how the prevention program can be funded. You can contact us at: the web page - www.KeepIowaBeautiful.com, the Director's e-mail: gschnepf@KeepIowaBeautiful.com, write to Keep Iowa Beautiful at 300 East Locust - Ste 100, Des Moines, Ia. 50319 or phone to 515-323-6507 or 6537.

Share your thoughts and help to support a program that will result in an attitude of zero tolerance to littering and a "litter free Iowa". The cost of conducting an effective prevention program is high and needs to be thoughtful, shared by all Iowan's and in depth. It must also be sustained for a period of time.

Just think - a litter free Iowa could be a Christmas gift from all of us to our State!

Helping to Keep Iowa Beautiful

Gerald F. Schnepf, Executive Director