



## Did you know?

- Australians generate almost 32 million tonnes of rubbish each year that can end up in our waterways, parks, streets and schools.
- Disposing of organic matter, such as throwing an apple core on the ground, is still littering and can cause animals that eat it to ingest harmful bacteria.
- Littering is an environmental crime and people can be given fines ranging up to \$10,000.
- There is no stereotypical 'litterer'. People respond to the place they are in, what other people are doing and the number of accessible bins. The more reminders people have not to litter, the more chance of having a litter free environment.

## About litter

Litter is an ongoing problem faced not just by every school, but by every community in Western Australia (WA). It can cause harm to people and wildlife, and creates problems in our schools, public spaces and waterways. Highly littered areas attract more litter, illegal dumping and petty crime. Taking positive action against littering goes well beyond the visual impact, and helps provide a cleaner safer community.

Plastic makes up the highest volume of litter in WA. Plastic shopping bags, for example, can take up to 1,000 years to break down, and can also cause an estimated 100,000 sea turtles deaths. The plastic that is littered around your school yard may end up in the storm water drain, harming many other marine animals as well. Once you take into account that there are many other types of litter, it becomes evident that addressing litter and littering is a necessary and extremely important task.



<sup>1</sup> For further information on Community Change's research into littering behaviours please refer to their website [www.communitychange.com.au](http://www.communitychange.com.au)

## Littering behaviour

Community Change, specialists in littering behaviour research, have identified and characterised a number of ways that people tend to dispose of litter. These littering behaviours include:

- foul shooting – throwing litter into a bin but missing
- flagrant flinging – litter is flung or dropped without concern
- clean sweeping – litter is swept from tables or chairs
- wedging – litter is stuffed into crevices and cracks
- grinding – grinding cigarette butts into the ground
- undertaking – burying litter
- inching – litter is left and the person slowly inches away from it
- dual depositing – most rubbish is disposed of appropriately but some is left behind.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever participated in these littering behaviors, or seen someone else do them?



Most students and teachers want to be part of a school community that has a clean and safe environment that helps to promote a healthy well balanced lifestyle. Educating students about the effects of litter is a key step towards litter reduction in your school and community.

## Being Waste Wise about litter

### Reduce – changing littering behaviour

Reduce means to create less waste in the first place so that there is less rubbish that might become litter or go to landfill. Reducing our waste is the most important step in waste and litter minimization.

In order for litter reduction and prevention to be effective, it is important to remember it is the behaviour of littering that needs to be addressed rather than the outcome of litter. Although regular clean-ups of highly littered areas in your school are necessary, using yard clean-ups as punishments sends a poor message about caring for the environment. Attitudes may also develop based on the belief that others will clean up litter around the school. It is important to raise awareness of the environmental, social and economic impacts of littering, and therefore the necessity to reduce.

### Reuse

Reuse means to use the same items repeatedly or even to find another creative way to use them, such as buying refills or decorating old jars to store other items. By reusing something again for a different purpose, chances are it won't become litter, will stay out of landfill, and perhaps can eventually be recycled.

### Recycle

Recycle means to return a waste or litter item to a factory where it can be made into another of the same product or into something completely different. For example, recycled aluminium cans are made back into cans, or used plastic peanut butter containers can be made into sleeping bag stuffing.

Teachers will find a variation in the information gained by students about the process of recycling the litter they clean up depending on where they live. Waste management varies throughout the councils in WA, in both metro and regional areas, in terms of landfill types, access to kerbside recycling and resource recovery facilities.

To help make it easy for students to 'do the right thing', it is a good idea to strategically place accessible recycling and rubbish bins in the areas where students are likely to litter. You can also involve students in painting the bins around the school grounds with positive anti-litter messages. This gives a sense of ownership and pride to those involved as well as drawing positive attention to the location of bins.

### Sources

*Litter Prevention Strategy for Western Australia 2009-2014*, Western Australia Litter Prevention Task Force, Keep Australia Beautiful Council (WA).

*Learning about litter Curriculum Resource*, Keep Australia Beautiful Council (WA).

*Marine Debris Education Kit*, Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society and Keep Australia Beautiful

### Websites

Community change: [www.communitychange.com.au](http://www.communitychange.com.au)

KAB Website: [www.kabc.wa.gov.au](http://www.kabc.wa.gov.au)

Keep South Australia Beautiful (KESAB) website: [www.kesab.asn.au](http://www.kesab.asn.au)

Victoria Litter Alliance: [www.litter.vic.gov.au/www/html/20-home-page.asp](http://www.litter.vic.gov.au/www/html/20-home-page.asp)

### The Waste Wise Schools Program

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