



## **The State of Littering in Tennessee**

It costs taxpayers at least \$15 million annually to pick up litter in Tennessee. That's why the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) is launching the new "Nobody Trashes Tennessee" litter prevention campaign.

The campaign is based on three research studies that were conducted in 2016:

1. Visible Litter Study (nFront Consulting)
2. Litter Attitudes and Behaviors Survey (Baselice & Associates)
3. Focus Groups (Prince Market Research)

Overall, the state of littering in Tennessee has improved significantly in the last 10 years, dropping by 53 percent. However, 2016 research shows there are still 100 million pieces of litter on TDOT rights-of-way.

The 2016 Visible Litter Study gauged the overall problem and all relatable tangible evidence. The other two studies sought to uncover the human behavior insights that go into littering, along with how Tennesseans can be most effectively reached with litter prevention messages.

### **2016 Visible Litter Study: Litter down 53 percent, but 100 million pieces remain**

A statewide litter study is conducted in Tennessee every 10 years. These studies identify the amount of litter on Tennessee roads, the types of litter, where it can be found, and actionable findings that will strengthen litter prevention efforts. Ultimately, the goal is to be strategic in reducing litter pickup costs to taxpayers.

Summary of key research points:

- There are 100 million total pieces of litter on Tennessee roadways, down 53 percent since 2006.
- 28 percent of litter is classified as intentional litter, meaning it's thrown right out of vehicle windows.
- 72 percent is considered negligent litter, which includes vehicle debris and trash flying out of uncovered pickup truck beds.

- Beverage containers, lids, and straws are the biggest problem with deliberate litter (11 percent). Within that category, snack food packaging (6 percent), napkins, paper bags, and tissues (5 percent), and cigarette packaging (2 percent) represent the next most significant items.
- Interstates have the most negligent litter, while state highways, U.S. highways, and local roads have more deliberate litter.
- Litter accumulates in places of high traffic, and in places where little to no personal ownership is present, such as rest stops.

National comparison: A 2009 national litter study by Keep America Beautiful found that there were 51 billion pieces of litter on roadways, costing government and businesses \$11.5 billion.

### **Attitudes and Behaviors: Young women litter the most, but men not far behind**

This study revealed who litters most in Tennessee, why, and what it might take to make them stop. Overall 1,001 Tennesseans were surveyed (508 by phone/493 by web).

While this survey uncovered dozens of actionable insights, its biggest contribution to solving the Tennessee littering problem was identifying a target audience for the upcoming campaign. The primary target audience was identified as women 16-34, with 71 percent of them describing themselves as litterers — higher than any other gender or age range. The secondary audience was identified to be men 16-34, with 64 percent of them describing themselves as litterers.

The good news is that nine out of 10 Tennesseans said, once being made aware of the litter problem, that they're willing to properly dispose of their trash. Key messages that resonated most included the \$15 million cost of litter and reminders about how litter accumulates on roadways.

Another highly actionable insight was that 81 percent of survey respondents said that they would refrain from littering if a child, including their own, asked them not to litter. A youth outreach campaign is planned for fall 2017.

### **Focus Groups: Confirms females litter, “Nobody Trashes Tennessee” resonates as effective slogan**

In the fall of 2016, focus groups were conducted in the four major markets of Tennessee (Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville).

Two groups (men, women) were held among adults under age 34 in each market. The primary objectives of these focus groups were to:

- 1) Dive deeper into littering behaviors, including the gender skew toward females
- 2) Identify how Tennessee culture could be used to combat littering
- 3) Test creative concepts and slogans

Key findings:

- Multiple focus group participants identified women in their lives that litter in order to keep their cars clean. They would rather litter than be perceived to have a dirty car.
- Nine out of 10 focus group participants admitted to littering in the past year.
- Most participants felt that Tennessee litter laws are not well enforced. Only 19 percent of participants said they have ever known someone to be ticketed for littering.
- Tennesseans could not fathom littering in “sacred” Tennessee places, such as parks, religious sites, and sporting venues.
- Preserving Tennessee’s natural beauty was a huge “preservation motivator.”
- Participants were asked if littering was a problem in Tennessee. After responding, they were told that there are 100 million pieces of trash on Tennessee roads, and that it costs \$15 million to clean up.
  - Before hearing litter facts
    - 35 percent say littering is a big problem in Tennessee
    - 55 percent say littering is a small problem in Tennessee
    - 10 percent say littering is not a problem in Tennessee
  - After hearing litter facts
    - 65 percent say littering is a big problem in Tennessee
    - 28 percent say littering is a small problem in Tennessee
    - 7 percent say littering is not a problem in Tennessee
- Six slogans were tested, and “Nobody Trashes Tennessee” resonated most because of pride in the state and zero tolerance for litter.
- Four public service announcement concepts were tested. The one that has been produced for debut in June 2017 resonated most because participants appreciated calling out the hypocrisy of keeping one’s personal space clean while trashing Tennessee. The PSA and other campaign materials can be found at [NobodyTrashesTennessee.com](http://NobodyTrashesTennessee.com)