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Media Contact:
Jonathan Jaffe
Jaffe Communications Inc.
908-789-0700
jonathan@jaffecom.com

Statewide Litter Survey Shows a 53 Percent Drop in Trash in New Jersey on Streets and Highways

New Jersey Clean Communities Council is Pleased with Ongoing Litter Abatement Efforts

TRENTON – July 30, 2018 – The New Jersey Clean Communities Council (NJCCC) today issued the findings of a comprehensive report that shows litter along streets and highways in the state has been reduced by 53 percent over the past 13 years.

“Litter is unsightly and can impact quality of life. Litter cleanup is a crucial part of protecting our natural resources,” said Assistant Commissioner Mark Pedersen of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Site Remediation and Waste Management Program, which administers the Clean Communities Program Fund.

The study, conducted by Environmental Resources Planning, LLC. of Gaithersburg, MD (ERP), shows that municipalities and counties across the state have effective litter abatement programs in place. The study results were based off a litter survey conducted in 2004, and the follow-up study conducted this year of 94 roadways statewide.

“This reduction was broadly seen throughout New Jersey: in all regions, all locales, 18 of our 21 counties and 93 percent of the sites surveyed,” said NJCCC Executive Director Sandy Huber. “It is important to note this survey did not include our beaches, which may show a different composition of litter.”

ERP researchers attribute the reduction of litter to state Clean Communities programs that have been strengthened since 2004. With a solid funding base provided by the state Clean Communities Act, NJCCC has expanded its network of Clean Communities coordinators,

established a coordinator training program through the Rutgers Office of Continuing Professional Education, and set up an online statistical report system designed to track the progress of local programs.

NJCCC has also partnered with the state Department of Environmental Protection and the state Department of Transportation (DOT) to administer the Adopt-a-Beach and Adopt-a-Highway programs, encouraging the volunteer cleanup of public lands. Based on information provided by the 2004 Litter Survey, NJCCC implemented a specific and ongoing “Slam Dunk the Junk” campaign to remind people put trash in litter or recycling bins, and not on the ground.

Significant findings of the report include:

- The largest volume of debris in New Jersey is from vehicles and construction, equaling 18.2 percent of the total litter spotted.
- Littered paper was second at 14.8 percent, followed by beverage containers at 14.1 percent. “Cups, lids and straws” were 10.3 percent, followed by bags and shrink wrap at 9.8 percent.
- There is an upward trend in the amount of tire scraps littering the state, with researchers deeming it “the most littered item of 2017.”
- Recycling education remains important, with nearly 29 percent of the littered items qualifying as “recyclables,” such as beverage containers, business papers and boxes.
- Pedestrians and motorists between the ages of 11 and 34 were found to be the most likely to intentionally litter in New Jersey, accounting for nearly 70 percent of all deliberate littering.

Steven Stein, Principal of ERP, provided recommendations to the NJCCC in the ongoing battle against litter. According to Stein, the goal is to develop specific abatement programs that address the most littered items, target the demographic of New Jersey most likely to litter, and identify “hotspots” where there is increased litter.

According to Huber, based on the findings of the report, NJCCC will look to expand litter abatement partnerships with stakeholders such as governmental entities, non-government organizations, and industry.

“There must be further emphasis on successful programs as Adopt-a-Highway and Adopt-a-Beach, while tracking the most frequently found items of litter,” Huber said.

Stein agreed. “This will help to direct the focus of litter abatement programs more effectively,” he said.

The report includes recommendations that will continue to decrease litter in the state including:

- Monitor and enforce littering violations caused by improperly secured trash on recycling collection vehicles during the collection and transportation process.
- Track the number of citations issued and fines paid. This will help the public understand the importance that police and judges place on the seriousness of litter violations. Income from fines and enforcement actions should go directly into municipal and county Clean Communities accounts.
- Monitor and enforce trash cans set at the curb. Cans without lids were observed spreading litter while this survey was being conducted. Moreover, recycling carts should continue to replace open-top recycling bins, reducing residential litter blowing away.
- Use more hidden cameras where widespread littering and illegal dumping occur.
- Ensure that all funds generated by material restriction taxes or fees continue to be dedicated solely to litter abatement programs. Consider amendments to the 2008 Clean Communities Program Act that will support recommendations and ensure a stable future for New Jersey Clean Communities.

According to DOT, over the last six years, collectively, the DOT, Adopt-a-Highway teams and prison inmate details have picked up between 3.5 tons to 5 tons of litter annually.

“There are still littered areas that need to be addressed, but the data from this survey shows that their efforts are paying off,” Stein said.

Currently, the state DOT is funding up to 10 crews with 10 inmates each working nearly full time to pick up litter. Over the last several years, the DOT has nearly doubled the use of this program. DOT crews have also been working to clean New Jersey’s interstate and major state roads.

DOT said the partnership between the NJCCC and the state’s “Adopt a Highway” program has encouraged more volunteers to clean up roadways, enhancing the effort of litter pick up by state workers and prison inmates.

“Adopt a Highway contributes to the cleanliness of state roads and calls attention to the need to keep the state clean,” Stein added.

To access the full report, visit

<https://njclean.org/images/VLS/2018-NJ-Litter-Survey-Final-Report-July-24.pdf>

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