THE ISSUES

Litter is addressed in this series of stormwater pollution fact sheets because litter is easily carried from the land into streams, rivers, and beaches by stormwater runoff through curb, gutter, and storm drain systems. In spite of decades of messages from anti-litter campaigns, litter continues to be a major environmental concern, threatening water quality, human health, and wild life, as well as creating unsightly road and waterways. Litter creates choking and entanglement hazards for wildlife, and hazardous materials leach into waters threatening drinking water health and the health of humans and animals that come into contact with the water or chemical.

Most litter in our waterways comes from land-based sources. The most common sources of litter are pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists who do not use proper receptacles, improperly covered commercial dumpsters, commercial and recreational marinas lacking proper waste receptacles, construction and demolition sites, trucks with uncovered loads that allow litter to blow out onto roadways, and household trash that is scattered before or during collection.

Litter often results when people feel a lack of connection to a community, or a lack of pride in a place of business or residence. For the Grand Strand, litter generated during the busy tourist seasons becomes a major issue for the year-round residents. However, residents must also take responsibility for some of the litter issues along our local roads and in our local waterways. There are many simple steps you can take to protect our local environment from the negative impacts of litter.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Participate in a beach or river clean up. Every year, several times a year, local organizations such as the Waccamaw Riverkeeper® Program and Murrells Inlet 2007 sponsor beach, river, and roadside clean ups. You can take part in these and help rid the local waters of accumulated litter, or you can sponsor your own clean up in your local park or neighborhood and encourage your neighbors to join you and take pride in their community. You can even choose to adopt a spot, such as the front of your business or entrance to your neighborhood to consistently maintain a litter-free zone. Lead by example, and these efforts may encourage others to do the same.

Properly dispose of any litter or garbage. If you are not near a proper trash receptacle, secure your litter until it can be properly discarded. This may mean carrying a plastic drinking cup around with you during a summer trip to the beach, or leaving a fast food bag in your car until you stop at a gas station. Whatever the situation, carrying trash with you is always better than throwing it out of the car window, on the ground, leaving it on a park bench, or discarding it anywhere else than a proper trash or recycling bin. If everyone took this simple step to putting litter in its place, many of our unsightly litter issues would be resolved.

Use ash trays, trash cans, or pocket ash trays for disposal of cigarette butts. Cigarette butts are the most littered item in America, and are the most common item reported during beach, river, and roadside clean ups. Since most states now have bans against indoor
smoking in offices, restaurants, and even bars, the majority of smoking occurs outdoors, and without adequate cigarette receptacles in place, cigarette litter is becoming a greater problem. Research has found that smokers who would never consider littering other items is still likely to litter cigarette butts, not considering them a litter item. Remember that littering lighters, cigarette packages, matches, and cigarette butts is no different than littering paper or plastic. Encourage fellow smokers to take responsibility for their cigarette litter as well.

Do not use advertising methods that promote litter such as leaving flyers on car windshields or doorknobs. Such flyers become a nuisance when they blow away or uninterested customers throw items on the ground upon return to their vehicles.

Business owners should provide ample waste and cigarette receptacles inside their businesses, and at business entrances, exits, loading docks, picnic areas, parking lots, and sidewalks or anywhere else that people gather. Properly empty and maintain receptacles at all times. Ensure that doors on commercial dumpsters are closed to prevent scavengers from spreading trash.

Make sure that trashcans have lids that can be securely fastened or use bungee cords to hold them in place. Secure all bags and use twine to secure loose trash or tie paper into bundles for curbside trash collection. Avoid placing trash for curbside pick-up outside too far in advance if the weather is rainy or windy, which increases the chance that trash will blow away.

Recycle! A large percentage of litter that is collected during clean up events is recyclable material such as glass or aluminum. You can help reduce the amount of litter generated, and save landfill space by recycling glass, plastic, aluminum, paper, and any other recyclable material.

Be sure that large events have large and well marked trash receptacles. Local governments should plan ahead for the tourist season or busy holidays like July 4th to make sure that additional waste generated at these times does not end up in our local waterways. Citizens should encourage event organizers and their local governments to take action towards reducing the amount of trash and the impact left by these large events.

Report litter offenders. If you see litter being thrown from a vehicle, record the license number and color of the vehicle and the date, time, and location of the incident. For illegal dumping, report the date, time, location, and description of the problem. See report contact information below.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Keep Georgetown Beautiful
http://www.cityofgeorgetownsc.com/kgbeautiful.aspx

Palmetto Pride—SC Anti-litter Organization
http://www.palmettopride.org/about.htm

SC DHEC Office of Solid Waste Reduction & Recycling
www.scdhec.gov/environment/lwm/recycle/index.htm

Horry County Solid Waste Authority—Recycling
www.solidwasteauthority.org/recycling/business.htm

Georgetown County Landfill 843-545-3443
Georgetown County Recycling 843-545-3452
Georgetown Litter Hotline 843-545-4887 (54-LITTR)
Georgetown Co. Litter Control 843-546-5102
Horry Co. Litter Control 843-915-5450