



Frequently Asked Questions about

Litter Hotline: 1-866-LITTER1 (1-866-548-8371)

from Ecology's Solid Waste & Financial Assistance Program

Q: What is the litter hotline?

A: It is a toll-free phone line that people can use to report littering incidents they witness. These incidents include not only a person throwing something out the window of a vehicle, but also an item falling from an unsecured load. The state Department of Ecology operates the litter hotline in cooperation with the Washington State Patrol and the Washington State Department of Licensing.

Q: What is the litter hotline number?

A: The toll-free phone number is 1-866-LITTER-1 (1-866-548-8371). The Department of Ecology has contracted with Americall Inc. in Tacoma, Washington, to answer the hotline. Operators are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Q: What happens when a caller reports a litterer?

A: The state uses a caller's information to check the license plate number and car description with information in the Department of Licensing vehicle-registration system. If the plate and description match, the Washington State Patrol sends the registered owner of the vehicle a letter notifying them of details of the incident and the fines for littering.

Q: Why do we have a litter hotline?

A: Research with people who litter showed that enforcing litter laws is the biggest deterrent to littering. The litter hotline program lets people know about the fines for littering. It also sends a strong message that fellow citizens care about littering and do not accept such behavior.

Over 12 million pounds of litter build up on Washington roadways each year. The Department of Ecology spends approximately \$4 million a year on cleanup. Litter isn't just an eyesore; litter poses serious health and safety hazards when thrown by people or when falling from unsecured loads.

Q: Why does Ecology think the hotline is effective?

A: The hotline program gives the state a chance to communicate one-on-one with a potential litterer. People may see a road sign or hear a radio commercial, but when they get a letter from Washington State Patrol they are more likely to get the message.

The hotline lets people who do not litter be part of the solution. A phone survey showed that 85 percent of respondents would use a litter hotline. The main reason given was, "litter bothers me and this is a good chance to do something about it." People who get hotline letters were also surveyed; 78 percent believe the hotline program is effective and 92 percent are not likely to litter again.



Q: What information do I need to give the litter hotline operator?

A: For the state to take action, the caller must provide the license plate number of the vehicle involved in the incident. The hotline doesn't take reports of places with a lot of litter, or requests to clean them up. In addition to the toll-free number, an on-line reporting system is now available at www.litter.wa.gov. If you find an e-mail more convenient, you may send one to litter1@ecy.wa.gov. Include all the following information:

- License plate number (Please note: only Washington state plates can be accepted.)
- Vehicle description (make, model, type, color)
- Who littered (driver, passenger, or unsecured load)
- Description of what was littered
- Date and time of incident
- Location (highway, road, intersection)
- Direction of travel
- Nearest town

Q: What happens if you are reported for something you didn't do?

A: Some people complain about receiving the State Patrol letter and say the report is untrue. The state sends these people a letter of apology and assures them that the incident does not affect their driving record. Ecology does **not** release hotline records. Ecology and Washington State Patrol employees coordinate responses to complaints about the litter hotline. The grievance rate is an average of two percent of all letters sent.

Q: Will the litterer get a ticket based on a litter hotline report?

A: No, the State Patrol cannot issue tickets based upon hearsay. A law enforcement officer must witness the event to write a ticket. The litter hotline program tries to educate potential litterers about the fines they may face if issued a ticket and persuade them not to litter in the future. If the hotline has had reports about the registered owner of a vehicle before, the letter will point out that this is not the first time that their vehicle had been reported.

Q: How many calls does the hotline receive?

A: Litter hotline activity has increased dramatically in a short amount of time. In 2002, the year the hotline began, 6,060 people called in reports. By 2006, the hotline got a total of 60,000 calls. The peak call volume comes during the summer months when more people are traveling and when commercials featuring the hotline phone number are on the air. Periodically Ecology updates statistics on its Web site at www.litter.wa.gov/c_hotline.html.