




## Tennessee's Litter Problem

As Tennesseans we have a lot to be proud of: our music, our barbecue, our beautiful state parks, the distinguished universities, the icons that call it home, and so much more. However, there is one thing we're not proud of – our litter problem.

From the Great Smoky Mountains to the Mississippi River, and every stretch of roadway in between, litter on Tennessee's 96,167 miles of public roads – 4,022 of which are classified as scenic – is more than an eyesore. It's an enormous burden to the state with impacts on public health and safety, the environment, and the economy.

In addition to being an eyesore, litter on Tennessee's roadways impacts public safety, the economy and the environment and costs the state more than \$35 million a year on pickup and prevention education.


Overall, the state of littering in Tennessee has improved significantly since 2006, dropping by 43 percent. However, there are still 88 million pieces of litter on the state's roadways at any given time. How do we know? Because we counted, via a pioneering 2016 Visible Litter Study and counted again in a 2022 Visible Litter Study.



**OVER 35 MILLION**  
Amount TDOT spends annually on litter pickup and prevention education



**88 MILLION**  
Pieces of litter on Tennessee roadways at any given time



**43%**  
Reduction of statewide roadside litter since 2006

## Nobody Trashes Tennessee

Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) is on a mission to reduce littering, and in 2016, launched the Nobody Trashes Tennessee (NTT) litter prevention campaign. Nobody Trashes Tennessee is a comprehensive statewide litter prevention campaign that tells the story of litter on Tennessee's roadways and its impact on the state. By juxtaposing the beauty of Tennessee with the ugliness of littering, the campaign makes it clear that Nobody Trashes Tennessee.

Rooted in research conducted in 2006, 2016 and 2022, including the "Visible Litter Study" (nFront Consulting, 2016), "Litter Attitudes and Behaviors" (Baselice & Associates, April 2016), Focus Groups (Prince Market Research), and "Visible Litter Study" (Burns & McDonnell, 2022) the campaign shows that despite a drop of 53% in roadside trash between 2006 and 2016, and a 12% reduction in litter from 2016 to 2022, there are still 88 million pieces of litter on the state's roadways at any given time.

Recent research conducted in May 2021 includes a quantitative survey to determine baseline awareness of the litter problem and the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign (Decision Analyst, 2021). Focus groups were also held to help understand attitudes towards litter and to test litter prevention messaging for the next phase of the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign (Epiphany, 2021).



**NOBODY<sup>SM</sup> TRASHES TENNESSEE**

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**Campaign goals:**

- Reduce the amount of roadside litter across the state
- Reduce the amount of money spent on litter pickup
- Maintain constant litter prevention education awareness

Additionally, the campaign educates Tennesseans on the scope of the problem and provides resources and opportunities for residents to take both personal and community actions to help prevent and reduce litter. Since 1983, revenue from a tax on soft drink and malt beverages has provided the funds for TDOT's litter pickup and prevention education.

## Research Key Findings

- There are 88 million pieces of litter on the state’s roadways at any given time.
- 46% of Tennesseans say litter on roadways is a “very serious” problem. Only pollution on rivers, lakes and waterways and risk of extreme weather events are a more serious problem.
- 28% of litter is classified as intentional litter, meaning it’s thrown right out of vehicle windows.
- 53.9% is considered negligent litter, which includes vehicle debris and trash flying out of uncovered pickup truck beds.
- 18% of litter ends up in Tennessee’s streams and waterways as pollution
- Interstates have the most negligent litter, while state highways, U.S. highways, and local roads have more deliberate litter.
- Cigarette butts and small pieces of paper are the most commonly items intentionally tossed
- Beverage containers, lids, and straws are the biggest problem with deliberate litter (11%). Within that category, snack food packaging (6%), napkins, paper bags, and tissues (5%), and cigarette packaging (2%) represent the next most significant items.
- Litter accumulates in places of high traffic, and in places where little to no personal ownership is present, such as rest stops.
- The state’s worst litterers toss trash out the window in order to keep their cars clean
- Nine out of 10 Tennesseans are more likely to properly dispose of their trash after learning about the statewide litter problem
- Just over half of Tennesseans have been in a vehicle when someone or themselves have thrown out smaller pieces of paper.
- The most frequent littering incident reported in the past three months is “throwing a cigarette butt out of a vehicle” followed by “trash falling out of a pickup.”
- Up to a \$2500 fine is the most motivating message, followed by it’s against the law to litter in Tennessee.
- The cost to taxpayers and animal-related messaging are extremely motivating for at least 51% of these Tennesseans.

# Nobody Trashes Tennessee

## Grantees & Partners

As part of Nobody Trashes Tennessee’s comprehensive approach to reduce littering, grantees, nonprofits and partner organizations bring the NTT campaign to their communities through TDOT’s Litter Grant Program.

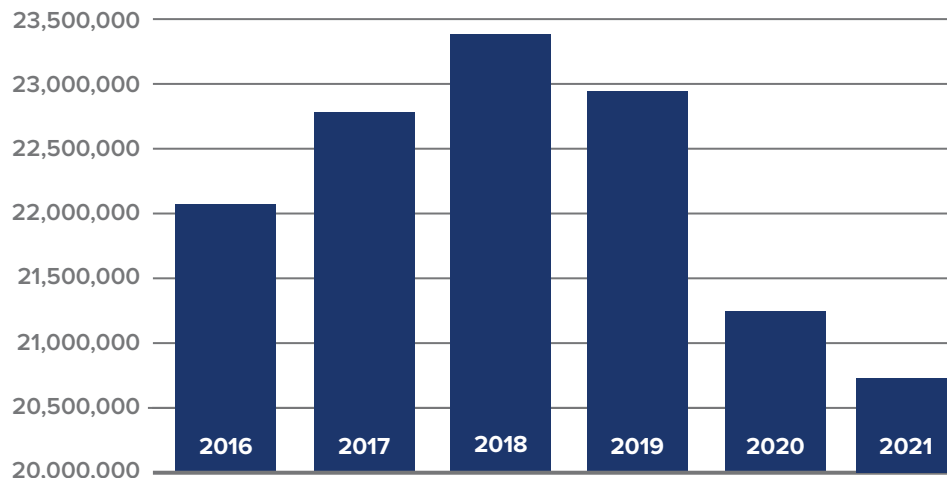
- Nobody Trashes Tennessee gave \$5.5 million in grants in 2021 to all 95 counties throughout the state for local litter programs.
- Last year, Nobody Trashes Tennessee granted \$1.9 million for special community-based projects.
- Keep Tennessee Beautiful is an important partner to our programs. In 2021, we supported them with a \$1.3 million grant.
- The county litter grant program is responsible for removing an average of 11,573 tons of litter each year.
- Over the 37-year history of the program, more than 428,200 tons of litter have been removed from our roadways.
- County governments in Tennessee used litter grant funds to clean up 4,023 illegal dump sites in 2021.



### Litter Removal by Fiscal Year

Year	Pounds	US Tons
2016	22,064,623.83	11,032.31
2017	22,724,846.40	11,362.43
2018	23,358,360.09	11,679.18
2019	22,987,734.31	11,493.87
2020	21,232,819.41	10,616.41
2021	20,547,662.20	10,273.83

### Pounds of Litter Removed by Fiscal Year



## Nobody Trashes Tennessee Grantees & Partners



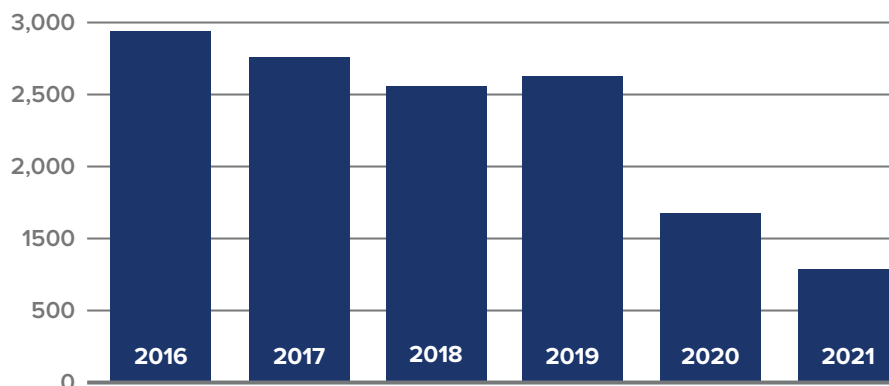
When Tennesseans see someone litter from their car, they are encouraged to report the incident through TDOT's Litter Hotline (1-877-8-LITTER). The Litter Hotline is an educational tool reminding those who engage in littering that their actions are hurtful to the state and their community. A letter reprimanding offenders by discouraging litter behavior and informing them that littering is against the law and punishable by a fine is mailed to the registered owner of the vehicle along with Nobody Trashes Tennessee education information. The entire program is anonymous and records are not kept of individuals who make the report or those that receive a letter. In 2021, there were 1,346 reports to the Litter Hotline.



### Litter Hotline Reports by Fiscal Year

Year	Reports
2016	2,460
2017	2,272
2018	2,051
2019	2,137
2020	1,251
2021	1,346

### Litter Hotline Reports by Fiscal Year



# Nobody Trashes Tennessee

## Grantees & Partners



Adopt-A-Highway is a volunteer program that is completely free for businesses, organizations and individuals who commit to cleaning up a TDOT-approved two mile stretch of roadside each quarter. Volunteers must be at least 12 years old and sign a waiver at which point they are given plastic bags, caution signs and safety vests by the nearest TDOT district office. Participants are recognized for their efforts with a sign placed along their adopted route. The program promotes community engagement and helps reduce the millions of dollars TDOT spends on litter removal each year.

The program is not only an excellent way to boost litter prevention awareness and promote community engagement, but it also reduces the millions of dollars TDOT spends on litter removal each year. Businesses, groups, or individuals are eligible to participate in the free program. For more information, please visit <https://www.tn.gov/tdot/environmental-home/environmental-highway-beautification-office/adopt-a-highway.html>, or by contacting TDOT's Highway Beautification Office at (615) 741-2877.

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### Adopt-A-Highway Fiscal Year 2022

