



# Frequently Asked Questions about **Litter Hotline: 1-866-LITTER1** **(1-866-548-8371)**

from Ecology's Solid Waste & Financial Assistance Program, Statewide Resources Section

**Q: What is the litter hotline?**

**A:** It is a toll-free phone line available to people to report littering incidents they witness, such as a person throwing something out the window of a vehicle or 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 litter hotline number is 1-866-LITTER-1 (1-866-548-8371). The Department of Ecology has contracted with Americall Inc. in Tacoma, Wash., to answer the hotline. Operators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Q: Why do we have a litter hotline?**

**A:** Focus group research with people who litter indicated that enforcement of littering laws would be the biggest deterrent to littering. The litter-hotline program informs people about the fines associated with littering. It also sends a strong message that fellow citizens care about litter (enough to make a phone call) and that littering is not accepted.

Over 12 million pounds of litter accumulate on Washington roadways each year. The Department of Ecology alone spends approximately \$4 million a year on cleanup. It's not only an eyesore; litter thrown by people or falling from unsecured loads poses serious health and safety hazards.

**Q: Why does Ecology think the hotline is effective?**

**A:** The hotline program provides a one-on-one opportunity to communicate with a potential litterer. While people may make note of a road sign or radio commercial, when they get a letter addressed to them, they are more likely to read it and there is a better chance of the message getting across.

The hotline enables the public that does not litter to be a part of the solution. Results from a telephone survey indicated that 85 percent of respondents would use a litter hotline. The primary reason given was, "litter bothers me and this is a good chance to do something about it."



**Q: What information do I need to give the Litter Hotline operator?**

**A:** In order for action to be taken, the caller must provide a license plate number of the vehicle involved in the incident. The hotline is not designed to take reports of locations where there is a lot of litter. An on-line reporting system is not in place, but if sending an e-mail is more convenient, an email with all the required information (listed below) may be sent to [litter1@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:litter1@ecy.wa.gov). The hotline operator will ask for the following information:

- License plate number (Please note: only Washington state plates can be accepted. There is no system for contacting owners of vehicles registered in other states.)
- Vehicle description (make, model, type, color)
- Who littered (driver, passenger, unsecured load, etc.)
- Description of what was littered
- Date and time of incident
- Location (highway, road, intersection)
- Direction of travel
- Nearest town

**Q: What happens after I make a report to the litter hotline?**

**A:** The call information is used to cross-reference the license plate number and car description with information in the Department of Licensing vehicle-registration system. If the plate and description match, the listed registered owner of the vehicle is sent a letter from the Washington State Patrol, notifying them of details of the incident and the fines for littering.

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

**A:** Those people that complain about receiving the hotline letter and say that the report is inaccurate are sent a letter of apology and assured that the incident does not affect their driving record. Ecology does not release the names and addresses of registered owners obtained through the Litter Hotline except in accordance with state law. Ecology and Washington State Patrol employees coordinate responses to complaints about the litter hotline. The grievance rate is less than 5 percent of all comments received.

**Q: Will the litterer be sent a ticket based on a litter hotline report?**

**A:** No, tickets cannot be issued based upon hearsay. A law enforcement officer must witness the event to write a ticket. The litter hotline program is intended to educate potential litterers about the fines they may face if issued a ticket and persuade them to not litter in the future. Upon a multiple offense, the registered owner of the vehicle will be alerted that this is not the first time his or her vehicle has been reported to the hotline.

**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 was launched, 6,060 calls were received. By 2004, the hotline employees processed 17,132 calls, with peak call volume during the summer months when more people are traveling and when commercials featuring the hotline phone number were broadcast. Statistics are periodically updated on Ecology's Web site at: [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/litter/c\\_hotline.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/litter/c_hotline.html).

*If you need this information in an alternate format, please call the Solid Waste and Financial Assistance Program at (360) 407-6900. If you are a person with a speech or hearing impairment, call 711 or 800-833-6388 for TTY.*