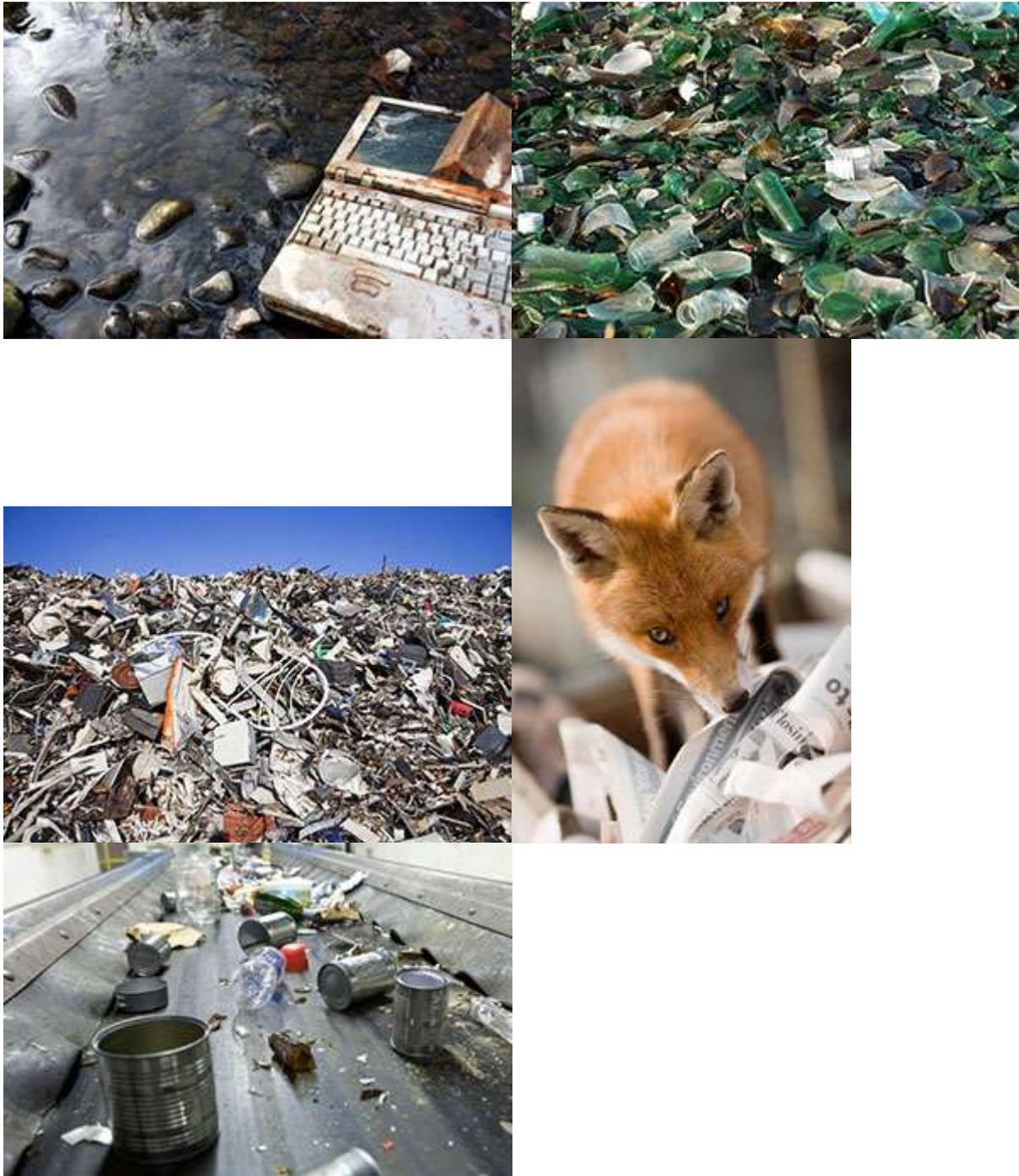


Litter: its impact on local communities



Littering is not a small problem. It is believed that 62% of people in England drop litter, although only 28% of people admit to it. A shocking 99% of streets in town centres have cigarette litter. It seems that it has gradually become more acceptable for people to drop litter, with over 30 million tonnes of litter collected from the streets in England each year – enough to fill Wembley Stadium to the very top four times. Keep Britain Tidy wrote in a recent report that "litter is one of the first signs of social decay. If we don't care about litter on our street, in our parks or on our high streets, we are unlikely to care about other environmental issues that negatively impact on our lives, our communities and society".

Effect on residents

People should be proud of the areas that they live in. If an area has a litter problem, it is going to reduce or even destroy the pride that residents have about living there. When an area has a litter problem, its residents don't want to spend time there, meaning an area becomes uncared for, community spirit suffers, and as a result people's wellbeing and health suffer. It also means that residents worry about other problems associated with litter, such as economic impact, crime and anti-social behaviour. This is not a small problem. 62% of people in England are concerned about the appearance of their area, with 57% considering litter to be a problem in their area.

Effect on health

It is no surprise that an increase in litter leads to an increase in rats, which creates a health hazard.

Studies have shown that people who live in clean areas with lots of green spaces have much better mental and physical health than people who live in areas with a litter problem. People who live in a poor quality environment are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, including anxiety and depression.

People who live in areas where there are high levels of graffiti and litter are more likely to be less physically active, and therefore more likely to be overweight and obese. This brings with it all the associated health risks, including diabetes, heart attacks and strokes, and thus puts more of a strain on local health facilities such as GP surgeries and hospitals A&E departments.

Effect on the environment

Litter isn't just unsightly for people – it is dangerous for animals, including domestic pets as well as wildlife. The RSPCA receives more than 7,000 calls per year regarding animals that have been injured by litter, but adds that the true number of animals injured by litter will never be known, as many wild animals will die from their injuries and not be found, and many owners will take their pets directly to the vets.

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/litter>

Just because litter has been discarded in one place doesn't mean it will stay there. It is quite easy for litter that has been dumped inland to get carried by the wind and the weather and end up in streams and rivers, and thus to make its way into the seas and oceans. 80% of the litter in the seas comes from the land, with the UN estimating that there are 46,000 pieces of plastic in every square mile of the ocean. This plastic is eaten by all types of creatures in the sea, and it is now the case that one third of fish caught in the English Channel that are for human consumption contain small pieces of plastic, which could eventually lead to health problems.

Effect on the economy

Local authorities are the largest group of land managers in England. It is therefore not surprising that they have to spend the most amount of money picking up litter and keeping land clean.

It costs the taxpayer almost £1 billion per year to keep England's streets, parks, roadways and public spaces clean.

That is £1 billion which is being spent by local authorities to keep our streets clean. And it is £1 billion which could be being spent elsewhere. A survey of local authorities and other land managers carried out by Keep Britain Tidy showed that 71% felt that if they didn't have to use resources on dealing with litter, they would be able to either reinvest that money into other services, or they would be able to reduce the council tax or service charges that people were having to pay.



It has been suggested that £1 billion could be used to fund any of the following:

- 38,644 social care workers
- 301,476 primary school places
- 4,400 libraries
- 33,200 nurses
- 26,900 paramedics
- 31,990 firefighters
- 1 billion school dinners

Alternatively, £1 billion would pay 704,200 households' gas and electricity bills for a year, taking many people out of fuel poverty, or improve the green economy by creating 2,000km of cycle lanes, make 333,000 homes more energy efficient, or create more than 193,000 community food growing spaces.

The £1 billion figure is just the cost of picking up the litter and keeping our streets clean. It does not include the cost to local authorities from loss of business, tourism, the impact on people's health, the impact on the environment, the costs to society, and other considerations. The financial cost of litter is therefore huge.



It also isn't just local authorities that are having to spend large amounts of money to clean up other people's litter. The Highways Agency spends more than £10 million of tax payers money each year picking up litter from the side of motorways and major A roads. It is estimated that they collect over 180,000 sacks of litter each year. Network Rail spends more than £2.3 million each year dealing with fly tipping on land it owns. In 2011/2012, the Royal Parks spent £300,000 cleaning up litter in Hyde Park. Other organisations that have to spend large amounts of money cleaning up litter include the utilities companies, the National Health Service, the National Trust and the Forestry Commission, not to mention shopping centres, theatres, cinemas, and sports stadiums.

Effect on businesses and tourism



Litter has a major effect on business and tourism for areas. If a city, town or village is full of litter, it will illustrate that it is uncared for and will discourage people from visiting that area. Quite simply, this is because cities, towns and villages that are full of litter are not pleasant places to be. If it discourages people from visiting that area, it means that local shops will lose trade, as there will be less people visiting the area to use local shops.

It is not just cities, towns and villages that suffer either. National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, beaches, parks and general countryside which rely on tourism but are perceived to have a litter problem will see less people visiting them and less visitors to nearby towns and tourist attractions. After all, who wants to take their children to sit on a beach that has litter on it? Who wants to take their children for a walk or a picnic in the countryside if the footpaths, parks, fields and picnic sites are strewn with litter? Who wants to go for a romantic weekend away to an area that is covered with rubbish? Quite simply, if an area is seen as having a litter problem, people won't visit it and that area will not experience growth.

It has also been proven that littering has another negative impact on businesses in the form of brand association. If a company's products or packaging are seen as litter, it damages the reputation of the product. A survey by Keep Britain Tidy showed that around one in three people would be less likely to buy from a brand that they see as litter on the street. A study has also shown that customers are unwilling to spend as much on a product if its packaging is frequently seen as litter, and it has been estimated that this could lead to a 2% drop in a company's turnover.

Effect on crime and anti-social behaviour



If an area is blighted by litter and graffiti, it can be the start of a slippery slope for crime and anti-social behaviour. Firstly, if an area is already affected by litter, then more people are likely to drop litter, with the mentality of if everyone else is doing it, I might as well do it. After all, what difference will one more piece of rubbish make when the area is covered with litter already? Studies have shown that this mentality then leads to further anti-social behaviour, such as smashing phone boxes or bus stops, and then trespassing and stealing money, and a survey of land managers showed that 8 out of 10 felt that dealing with minor crimes like litter and graffiti would help reduce larger crimes and improve public safety. A neglected environment is therefore a breeding ground for crime and anti-social behaviour.

With the annual cost of cleaning the UK streets estimated at £780 million and 14 million incidents of anti-social behaviour reported each year, environmental protection is becoming increasingly important to the nation. Kingdom provide fixed penalty notices to offenders who are seen to be breaking the Environmental Protection Act, reducing anti-social behaviour, as well as other techniques to manage our clients expectations. Read more about [Kingdom's Environmental Protection services](#).