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Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful in Partnership with DEP and PennDOT Announce Statewide Initiative to Reduce Littering

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, today announced in partnership with the Pennsylvania Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Transportation (PennDOT), an initiative to reduce littering in Pennsylvania. The results of the first statewide study on litter in over 20 years were presented at a meeting at the Hilton Harrisburg that was attended by more than 125 local government, legislative, business, and community organization partners.

The Pennsylvania Litter Research Study was conducted in 2018-2019 with funding from Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, DEP, PennDOT and Keep America Beautiful®. A phone survey collected 500 Pennsylvanians' views on litter and littering. Field teams performed on-the-ground litter counts in 180 locations statewide, including state and local roads in urban and rural areas. Burns & McDonnell, a full-service engineering, architecture, construction, environmental and consulting solutions firm, conducted the study, as part of a pilot to the upcoming national Keep America Beautiful Litter Study.

Top-line findings include:

- There are currently an estimated 500 million pieces of litter on Pennsylvania roadways.
- Of this litter, it is estimated to be composed of over 37% cigarette butts and over 30% plastic items.
- About 10% of all litter is composed of plastic film (7.8% food packaging film, and 2.1% other film)

“The Pennsylvania Litter Research Study is very timely as there is heightened awareness and a real sense of urgency for the need to properly manage many of these materials, particularly single-use plastics,” explains Shannon Reiter, president of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. “We believe understanding the scope of the problem is critical to influence change in behaviors, whether it be through public education or public policy.”

City government leaders from Allentown, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh detailed the high costs of addressing litter and illegal dumping in their cities. Wayne Bowen, senior recycling program manager at the Pennsylvania Recycling Markets

Center, discussed recycling infrastructure and markets in the state. Anne Johnson, principal and vice president at Global Corporate Sustainability, presented on the economic, environmental, and reputational costs of plastics.

California State University social psychologist Dr. Wesley Schultz presented his research on why people litter and a nationally recognized five-step process for behavior change. In an open discussion, meeting participants shared their views on priority areas and next steps in development of a statewide framework for litter reduction.

“Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has been leading cleanups for nearly 30 years,” said Reiter. “While cleanups are important, cleanups alone are not going to solve Pennsylvania’s litter and illegal dumping problem. We need to change behaviors.”

The meeting was organized by Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, in coordination with DEP and PennDOT.

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About Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful’s mission is empowering Pennsylvanians to keep our communities clean and beautiful. Since 1990, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful and its volunteers have removed over 141 million pounds of litter from Pennsylvania’s roadways, greenways, parks, forests, and waterways. To learn more about Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, visit www.keppabeautiful.org.