



February 19, 2020

## **Cost to pick up litter could feed thousands**

We toss a lot of trash. In public.

A recently released Pennsylvania Litter Research Study of 180 locations across the state found 502 million pieces of litter on the state's roads, the most-common items being cigarette butts and plastic food wrappers and bottles.

After visiting 180 random sections of urban and rural state highways, the surveyors extrapolated their findings to come up with the estimate. The study was done in partnership between the departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation and the group Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful.

The surveyors counted 83 different types of garbage, with cigarette butts comprising 37 percent of the total, plastic items 30 percent and items with some sort of plastic film another 10 percent.

Separately, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful surveyed nine cities across the state and found they are spending at least \$68 million a year on litter cleanup, with the state spending another \$13 million.

"Pennsylvania has many better uses for the millions of dollars that we're spending now on trash cleanup," said Deb Klenotic, a deputy communications director for the DEP.

That money could be used to hire policemen and firemen, repair roads and bridges or update parks, to name a few.

It also could be used to help feed those in need.

Feeding America is the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief network, consisting of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs. It says that every dollar donated to food banks and pantries across the country helps secure and distribute roughly 10 meals to people facing hunger.

If the state sliced the amount of money it spends on picking up other people's garbage in half, that money could provide 65 million meals to those who don't know where their next meal will come from.

In the wake of the study, the state plans to step up litter prevention efforts.

But change has to start with all of us. Think first before you casually toss a fast-food bag, empty beverage can or cigarette butt out of the car window and onto our landscape. Don't be too lazy or hurried to take the time to walk a few feet to dispose of trash in a receptacle. Keep it in your vehicle until you get home.

Littering is wasteful in more ways than one.

C'mon Pennsylvania, let's keep it clean.

— JGG