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Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Shares Results of Litter Cost Study Comprising Data from Nine Cities across Pennsylvania

*Study shows cities spend millions annually addressing litter
and illegal dumping*

Greensburg, PA (Feb. 5, 2020) – In 2019, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful commissioned Burns & McDonnell to document how much it costs nine Pennsylvania cities, varying in size and location across the Commonwealth, to manage litter and illegal dumping. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful released results to the public February 5, 2020. (www.dep.pa.gov/litteringactionplan)

The study found that Allentown, Altoona, Erie, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, and Scranton collectively spend more than \$68 million annually on cleanup, education, enforcement, and prevention efforts to address litter and illegal dumping. Eighty percent of the total costs go to clean up efforts and just 13% towards preventative measures.

The cost of dealing with litter and illegal dumping are quite large for communities but are often obscured because they are dispersed across various governmental departments as well as community-based organizations and volunteer groups.

“While litter and illegal dumping are often discussed as social or environmental problems, rarely do we think about their economic impact,” explains Shannon Reiter, President, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. “Understanding these costs is a critical first step in developing strategies to change littering behavior. We’re seeing that even extensive and expensive cleanup efforts can’t keep pace with the amount of litter that’s accumulating. The only way to reduce this cost burden is to reduce littering through preventive measures, such as expanding solid waste and recycling infrastructure and developing effective school-based and consumer education.”

“Through interviews, research and extensive data collection in nine cities of various sizes across the Commonwealth, we documented the annual costs for addressing litter and illegal dumping within each city,” says Veronica Roof, senior compliance specialist at [Burns & McDonnell](#). “The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, cities and organizations incur significant costs each year to prevent and clean up litter and illegal dumping in communities. Through this study, we’re proud to support Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful’s effort to create a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Pennsylvania.”

This study was made possible with financial support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation and each of the nine participating cities. Indirect support was provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

In tandem, the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Transportation (PennDOT) and Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful released reports with the first statewide scientific data on litter and litter attitudes in Pennsylvania.

The [Pennsylvania Litter Research Study](#) was conducted in 2018-2019 with funding from DEP, PennDOT, Keep America Beautiful, and Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. Field results indicate more than 502 million pieces of litter on Pennsylvania roads. The most common items are cigarette butts (37%) and plastics (30%), with plastic film and beverage containers most prevalent. Motorists and pedestrians are leading sources of litter, followed by improperly secured truck loads. Additionally, more than 90% of phone survey respondents said littering is a problem in Pennsylvania. More than 76% said it reduces property values and negatively affects tourism and business.

“We documented and identified the quantity, composition and sources of litter. We also looked at the attitudes around litter in Pennsylvania,” Roof says. “Whether intentional or unintentional, litter negatively impacts quality of life, our environment and economy. Studies like this one help inform a customized, strategic plan to reduce littering.” Learn more about Pennsylvania’s litter research results and littering reduction initiative at <http://www.dep.pa.gov/litteringactionplan>.

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About Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful’s mission is empowering Pennsylvanians to make 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.keeppabeautiful.org.