



Maryland State Highway Administration Litter Fact Sheet

What is litter?

Litter is trash on the roadsides. This includes cigarette butts, food wrappers, beverage containers and much more.

What are debris?

Debris includes illegal dumping of things like tires, sofas, desks, boats and other large bulk items.

How does litter and debris affect highway maintenance?

Litter and debris negatively affect highway maintenance operations, such as mowing, guardrail repair and many other aspects of maintenance. Before mowing operations can commence, crews must clear roadsides of litter and debris. Should a piece of mowing crew equipment strike a piece of litter, this could become a dangerous projectile to all highway users, as well as to mowings crews and damage mowing equipment.

How does litter impact highway drainage systems?

Highway drainage systems are designed for free flow of runoff and are an important safety aspect. When litter collects in drainage inlets, it impedes the flow of runoff and sometimes blocks the system completely. This can lead to water ponding or flooding on the roads and create a hazard for all highway users.

Is the Chesapeake Bay affected by litter?

State Highway Administration highway drainage enters retention ponds that help filter highway runoff before it is released into the environment. This water then runs into streams, creeks or brooks that are part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, which means eventually the water enters the Bay. Small debris caused by littering can work its way through the systems and into the Chesapeake Bay. This not only negatively affects water quality but also harms bay-area wildlife.

What is Operation Clean Sweep Maryland?

While SHA maintenance crews routinely pick up litter, both proactively and reactively through service requests tickets, before the mowing season begins and before high-travel holidays, SHA employs an all-hands-on-deck operation dedicated to nothing but litter. This is called Operation Clean Sweep Maryland. Crews perform a deep cleaning of litter and debris removal along Maryland roadsides.

Are there new and more efficient pieces of equipment that SHA is deploying?

The Maryland State Highway Administration has purchased several “Litter Pickers”. These are mechanical devices that basically rake the roadside and remove all sizes of litter. This speeds up the litter clean up effort.



(Litter Picker on the I-70 median in Frederick County.)

Litter is expensive and labor-intensive

Calendar Year	Expenditures	Bags of Litter Collected
CY 24	\$17,659,058	418,942
CY 23	\$18,512,823	495,937
CY 22	\$10,923,768	380,343
CY 21	\$11,985,547	495,937
CY 20	\$8,915,457	327,818

How to get involved with SHA’s anti-litter efforts?

The State Highway Administration Adopt-A-Highway program empowers individuals, local groups or clubs and communities to take an active role in keeping our state clean and beautiful. By adopting a section of highway approximately one mile long, volunteers help improve the environment, enhance the driving experience, and show their Maryland pride.

Learn more about the Adopt-A-Highway program by [clicking here](#).