



Litter Lookout  
A Summary Report

# Hey Nova Scotia, it's time to clean up!

Nova Scotia leads Canada  
in solid waste management.

  
**NOVA SCOTIA**  
Environment





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# Hey Nova Scotia, it's time to clean up!

Nova Scotia leads Canada  
in solid waste management.



**We send almost half  
as much waste to  
landfills as other  
Canadian provinces.  
From 1995 to 2000  
we cut the amount  
of waste we send to  
landfills in half. We're  
good at separating  
our waste, recycling,  
and composting.**

## **We are leaders, but we can do better**

**N**ova Scotia's Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act has set the most aggressive waste-reduction goal in Canada. Right now, each one of us sends 477 kilograms of waste to our landfills every year. By 2015, we want to cut that number to 300 kilograms per person per year. That is a 37 per cent reduction in waste. We are renewing our 1995 Solid Waste Strategy to help us meet this goal.

Our recycling and composting programs are so successful that the rest of the country and the world look to us as a leader in waste management.

But our public places tell a different story.

### **Nova Scotians litter**

Paper cups line our streets and highways. Candy wrappers and chip bags blow across our parks and schoolyards. Cigarette butts are everywhere.

#### **What is litter?**

Litter is trash that is left lying around instead of being put in its proper place. Sometimes people litter on purpose. They toss chip bags or candy wrappers on the ground instead of putting them in trash cans, for example. Sometimes people litter by accident. They fail to secure a load and let debris fly off a truck as it motors down the highway. Whether you litter on purpose or by accident, it is always against the law.



Rats, bugs, and disease-causing bacteria love litter. They use it to build their homes and raise big, hungry families.

Your paper cups and drink cans fill with rainwater. These little pools are the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes. They swarm and they can bite.

Decomposing litter in rivers and streams uses up the oxygen in the water. This destroys fish habitat and kills fish.

Litter clogs storm drains and can cause flooding.

## What's so bad about litter?

It's ugly. It spoils the natural beauty of our province. It can hurt and even kill wildlife. It drives tourists away. It can even make you sick.

### Litter hurts people

The trash you throw on the ground can hurt you or someone else. Imagine strolling barefoot along the beach and stepping on broken glass, a needle, or syringe. Imagine driving along the highway when a plastic bag suddenly blows in front of you and covers your windshield.

### Litter hurts animals

Some animals think litter is food so they eat it. Then they get sick and many animals die. This includes pets, farm animals, and marine life.

### Litter hurts tourism

People come from around the world to visit Nova Scotia. Last year Transworld Surf Magazine called Nova Scotia a surfer's paradise. In 2004, National Geographic Traveler Magazine ranked Cape Breton Island as the second best travel destination in the world. But tourists won't come back if the scenery is wrecked by litter.

### Litter hurts communities

People and businesses like clean communities. They stay away from communities that are filled with litter. Litter makes it look like the people in the community don't care about where they live.

It costs a lot more to clean up litter than it does to put trash where it belongs in the first place. Communities lose money when people and businesses stay away because of litter.

### Litterbugs breed litterbugs

When people see litter, they think it's OK. So they do it, too. Research shows that when people take care to put trash in its proper place, they are more likely to do other good things for the environment, like use less water and energy.

## What are we doing about litter?

A lot. Many people and organizations work hard to reduce litter, including:

- Government of Nova Scotia
- RRFB Nova Scotia
- municipalities
- Adopt-A-Highway
- Clean Nova Scotia
- businesses such as Tim Hortons
- schools
- youth groups such as Scouts and Cadets
- individuals

### Government of Nova Scotia

- Nova Scotia Environment is launching an anti-litter campaign to create awareness that littering is a problem in all communities throughout the province.
- Nova Scotia Environment hires youth through the Nova Scotia Youth Conservation Corps to pick-up litter and create awareness that littering is wrong.
- the Departments of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (TIR), and Environment partner with the Adopt-A-Highway (AAH) program.
- TIR creates signs for adopted sections of road, gives bags and supplies to volunteers, and helps by taking away garbage collected by volunteers.
- TIR hires summer work crews to clean-up litter around our roads.
- Nova Scotia Environment works with organizations such as RRFB Nova Scotia, Adopt-A-Highway, and Clean Nova Scotia to promote litter clean-up and reduction.



### RRFB Nova Scotia

- Helps people to learn about better ways to manage waste, including:
  - reducing the number of things we use that create waste
  - reusing things instead of throwing them away
  - recycling
  - composting

Through these actions, RRFB Nova Scotia hopes to improve Nova Scotia's environment, economy, and quality of life.

### Municipalities

- provide containers and services to help people get rid of their waste
- help people to learn the right way to get rid of their waste
- promote anti-litter messages
- organize litter clean-ups

### Adopt-A-Highway

- volunteers pick up litter along highways twice a year
- this program is run in partnership with Clean Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Lions Clubs and Women's Institutes, and several government departments

### Clean Nova Scotia

- helps teach youth about the importance of putting trash in its proper place
- organizes the Great Nova Scotia Pick-Me-Up once a year
  - volunteers pick up litter in local parks, schoolyards, streets, or wherever they choose

### Businesses such as Tim Hortons

- fund clean-ups such as the Great Nova Scotia Pick-Me-Up
- give money to community organizations so they can buy garbage bags, gloves, and other things they need to do litter clean-ups

### Schools and youth groups

- take part in Adopt-A-Highway and the Great Nova Scotia Pick-Me-Up
- organize their own clean-ups

### Individuals

- pick up litter wherever they see it

### Great Nova Scotia Pick-Me-Up

In 2007, more than 16,000 volunteers took part in almost 300 clean-ups.

Volunteers picked up more than 5,000 garbage bags full of trash, almost 700 blue bags full of recyclables, and more than 4,000 kgs of trash that could not be bagged.

Volunteers worked an average of two hours each for a total of more than 33,000 person-hours – that's like one person working continually for 4 years without sleeping, eating, or even taking a break.

# litter lowdown

## Have we made any progress?

**Y**es. This chart shows that the number of drink containers in our litter was drastically reduced after Nova Scotia brought in a deposit system.



### Are we doing enough?

**N**o. The 2008 Litter Survey shows that Nova Scotians litter more now than they did four years ago – 21 per cent more.

We need to do a better job of convincing people to put trash in its proper place. The 2008 Litter Survey gives us a better understanding of what people throw away and how much. This is an important step towards solving the litter problem.

Drink containers include

- pop bottles and cans
- beer, wine, and spirit bottles
- juice boxes
- milk containers – Nova Scotians do not pay a deposit on these containers and they cannot return them for a refund. Still, the number of these containers has gone down along with other drink containers because of the milk container stewardship program

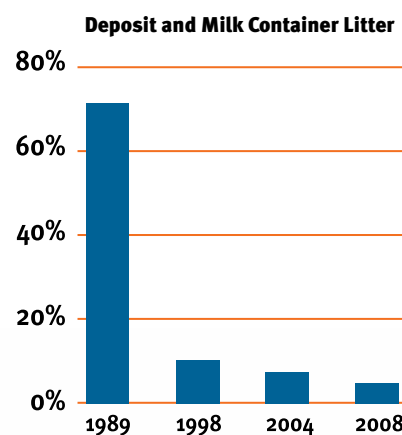
In 1989, more than 7 out of every 10 items we picked up were drink containers.

The deposit system was introduced in 1996.

When we did the next litter survey in 1998, only 1 out of every 10 items we picked up was a drink container. In our last litter survey, that number was cut in half so that 1 in every 20 items picked up was a drink container.

Today, almost 8 out of every 10 drink containers sold are returned for a refund.

This tells us that people like to get money back when they return items for recycling and are less likely to leave them lying on the ground.





In 2008, NSYCC worked with the Development Isle Madame Association to pick up litter on all of the island's roads. They picked up more than 400 bags of trash.

Between November 2007 and October 2008, 4,530kgs of debris was collected from illegal dumpsites in Colchester county.

## 2008 Litter Survey

### Who did the survey?

- four members of the NSYCC, Nova Scotia Youth Conservation Corps

### What is NSYCC?

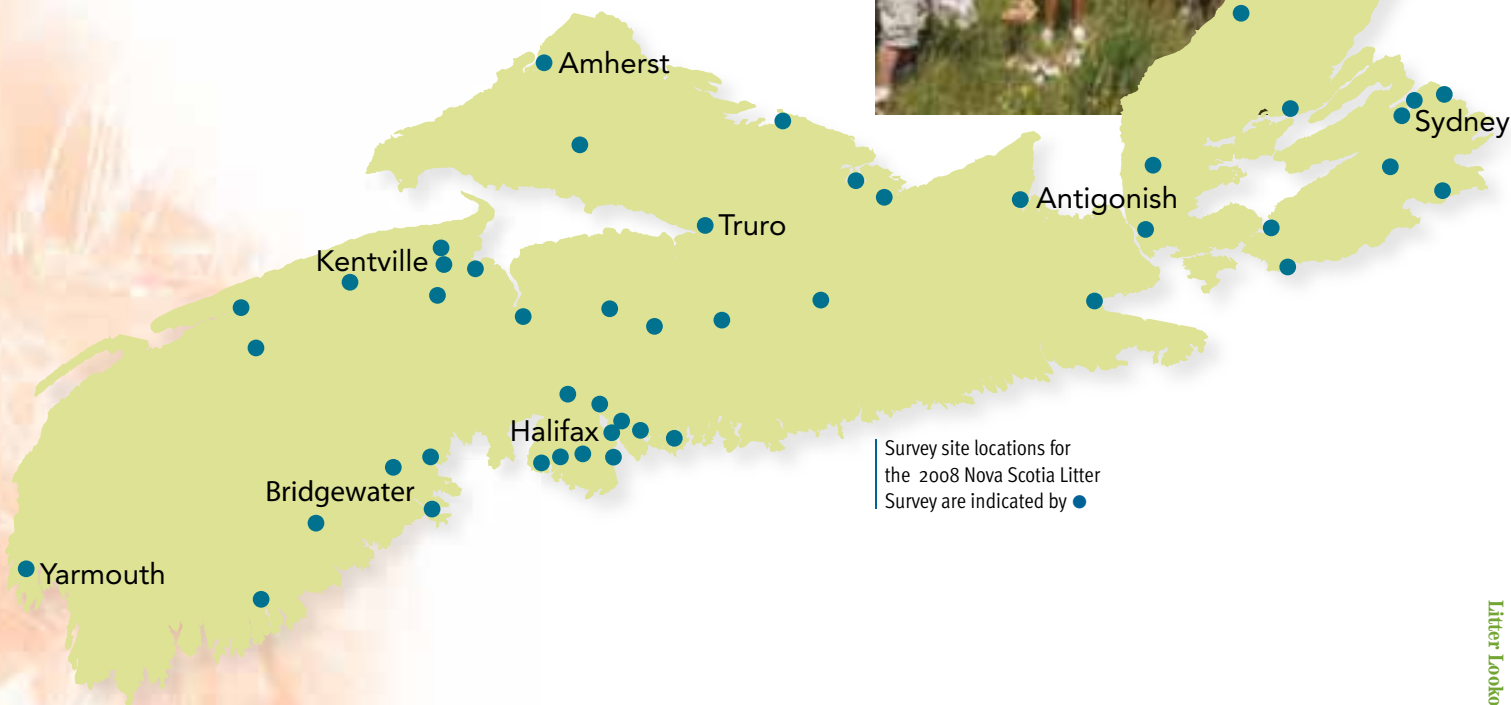
- a government program run by Nova Scotia Environment that
  - offers paid and volunteer work to youth aged 17 to 26
  - works with community partners across Nova Scotia to create environmental projects for summer jobs

### What did they do?

- picked up litter (anything that was the size of a bottle cap or bigger) from 55 randomly chosen sites across Nova Scotia
- counted the litter
- divided the litter into six categories
  - tobacco
  - snack food
  - grocery
  - drink containers
  - quick service
  - miscellaneous

### Where did they pick up the litter?

- the same 55 sites used in the 2004 Litter Survey
- there is one site for every 20,000 Nova Scotians
- the sites were chosen at random in all seven solid waste regions



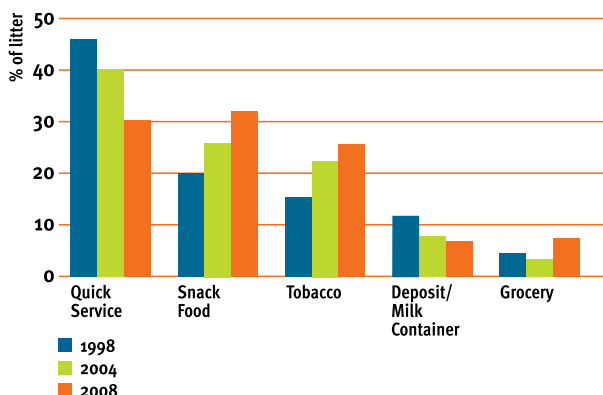
Cigarette butts are **NOT** biodegradable. That is, they do **NOT** break down naturally over time.

Wet cigarette butts leak lead, arsenic, tar, and other chemicals into the environment.

Some animals think cigarette butts are food and eat them. Then they get sick and some die. Researchers have found cigarette butts in the stomachs of fish, birds, squirrels, and even whales.

When people see cigarette butts on the ground, they think it's OK to litter so they throw other things on the ground.

**Comparison of the 1998, 2004, and 2008 Litter Surveys**



## When was the survey done?

- July and August 2008

## What did they find?

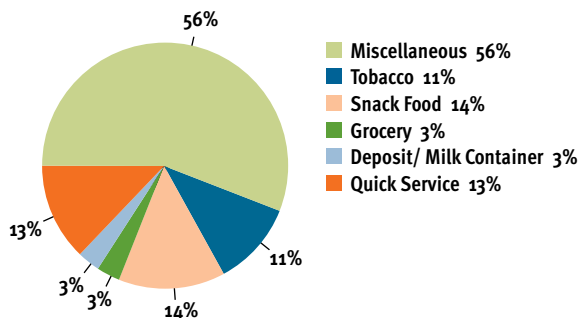
- more than 16,000 pieces of litter including
  - more than 11,000 cigarette butts

The chart on the upper left shows the amount of litter collected in 1998, 2004, and 2008. You can see that today, Nova Scotians toss more snack food and tobacco litter than they did in previous years.

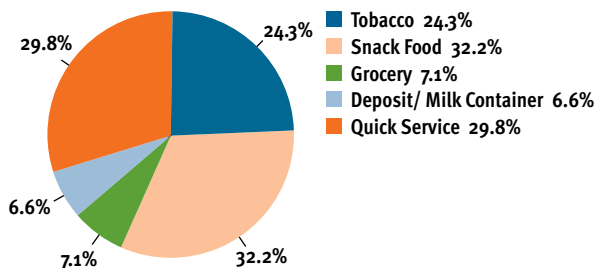
The chart on the middle left shows that most of the litter had to be classified as miscellaneous as it did not fall into any of the other categories. Of the litter that could be categorized, most fell into the following three categories

- snack food – such as chip bags, wrappers from chocolate bars, candies, gum, and cough drops
- quick service – litter from fast food restaurants including
  - plates and food containers
  - cups, straws, and trays
  - paper bags
  - ketchup, vinegar, salt, and sugar packets
  - plastic forks, spoons, and knives
  - napkins
- tobacco – packaging such as cigarette packs, cellophane wrap, foil

**Total Litter Composition** (excluding cigarette butts)



**Identifiable Litter Composition** (% , 2008, excluding cigarette butts)





There was less litter from grocery stores such as bags, packaging from large food items, and household products. There were few drink containers.

Almost 9 out of every 10 items picked up were tobacco products, most of which were cigarette butts. Snack food and quick service litter came a distant second with about 1 in every 20 items coming from those categories. The chart on the lower left shows that when we don't count cigarette butts, we find that more than 6 of every 10 items picked up come from snack food and quick service.

Since our first survey in 1989, we found that people toss out more and more litter from their snack food, and toss less and less litter from quick service. Today, for the first time, the amount of litter from snack foods is more than the amount from quick service. In fact, it's more than from any other category of litter except for cigarette butts.

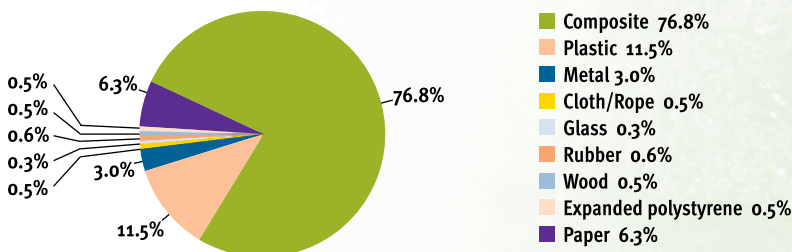
We also looked at what the litter was made of and divided it into these categories

- composite – things made out of more than one material such as cigarette butts and coffee cups
- plastic
- paper
- metal
- rubber
- wood
- expanded polystyrene, also known as Styrofoam
- glass
- cloth
- rope

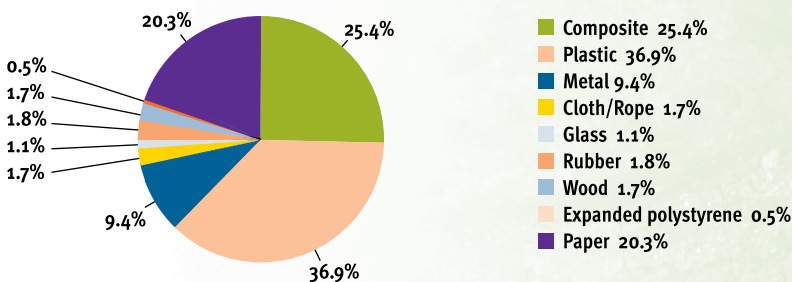
The chart below shows that most of the litter we picked up was composite – almost 8 out of every 10 items. Most of those items were cigarette butts.

The chart at the bottom shows that when we take cigarette butts out of the analysis, most of our litter is plastic – almost 4 out of every 10 items. Plastic is another material that is NOT biodegradable.

**Total Litter Composition by Material**



**Total Litter Composition of Material (excluding cigarette butts)**



Clean Nova Scotia and NSYCC surveyed 248 smokers in HRM, the Halifax Regional Municipality, and found:

Three out of every 10 smokers throw their cigarette butts on the ground.

Nine out of every 10 smokers said they know cigarette butts are litter.

Nine out of every 10 smokers said they throw their butts on the ground because there is no where else to put them.

# Kick butt campaign

## What's next?

We need to get people to put trash where it belongs

- in compost bins
- in recycle bins
- in trash cans

This year, Nova Scotia will launch a marketing campaign to do just that. We want to create an anti-littering culture. Otherwise, there will always be litter on the ground and there will always be people cleaning up after the litterbugs. These are some of the things volunteers could do if they didn't have to pick up someone else's trash

- volunteer in food banks to make sure everyone has enough to eat
- volunteer in libraries to help people improve their reading or English-language skills
- volunteer in hospitals and seniors' homes

Clean-ups are a costly way to deal with litter. Organizations and businesses spend money on things such as garbage bags and gloves to help with the clean-up. These things would not be needed if people put their own trash in its proper places.

Sure, we need to clean up the litter that is there now. But, more importantly, we need to stop littering. We recognize that changing behaviour will take time and effort.

The three main ways to get people to stop littering are

- **education and awareness**
  - using marketing campaigns like the one that will begin this spring
  - developing education programs to let people know littering hurts people and the environment
- **clean-up and monitoring**
  - monitoring the amount of litter that's out there and publishing reports like this
  - cleaning-up litter so that sites stay clean
- **compliance and stewardship**
  - research what other areas are doing to help people follow littering laws and increase compliance efforts
  - increase opportunities for product stewardship

Nova Scotia is already recognized as a leader in waste management. We want to keep that reputation and build on it. We're doing that through our renewed solid waste resource management strategy and projects like this one. If we continue our good work and build on our successes, we will have a greener economy by 2020 and a cleaner, greener province.

For more information about the **2008 Litter Survey**, or how to organize a litter clean-up in your community

Call **902-424-4300**

E-mail **SWRM@gov.ns.ca**







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