



What is Litter?

Fact Sheet: Litter - a problem we can solve

Litter is rubbish in the wrong place. It is a big problem in towns and the countryside. It is a bigger problem now than in the past because:

- There is more waste around than before.
- Packaging is made of plastic and aluminium, which do not rot away.
- Fast foods and eating in the streets have increased.
- People are buying more highly-packaged luxury goods.
- It pollutes streams.
- It is a danger to wildlife.
- It makes places look horrible.
- It is bad for tourism (a big source of income in Scotland)
- It costs a lot of money to clean up.

A threat to wildlife

Plastic bags are often swallowed by marine animals, especially sea turtles whose diet is mostly made up of jellyfish, when they are easily mistaken for food. One whale that was washed up on a beach in Scotland was found to have been suffocated by 50 plastic bags. On another Scottish beach a seal was washed up with a plastic strap around his snout – he died from starvation and exhaustion. Small mammals such as voles, shrews and hedgehogs are also in danger of getting trapped inside bottles or containers; when they can't get out they starve and die.

A danger to pets

Litter is not just a problem for wildlife: it is a danger to other animals, like farm animals and pets, too. A vet in Dundee treated 20 pets one year for paws that had been cut by sharp objects, and a surgery in Edinburgh reported several cases of dogs suffering from upset stomachs because they had eaten fast food litter on the street. Another vet, in Midlothian, reported injuries to horses, cattle and sheep caused by discarded cans and glass.

A feast for rodents

Food litter is a huge problem all over Scotland. It attracts rats that are looking for a meal; the more they eat the bigger they grow; and the more young rats they produce, the more rats we have. Wild rats carry lots of diseases. It is estimated that there are over 65 million rats in Britain today: that's more rats than people!

What can you do to help?

1. Always put your litter in a bin.
2. If there is no bin, or if it is full, take your litter home with you.
3. Always return or reuse bottles.
4. Organise an anti-litter campaign.
5. Encourage friends and family to be responsible about litter.
6. If litter is a problem in your area, report it to your local council and if you see any injured wildlife, it should be reported to the SSPCA.