



Clean Land, Safe Water, Healthy Lives



Does the Regional Litter Prevention Campaign Change Behavior? A Pilot Evaluation in Prince George's County

The Regional Litter Prevention Campaign

Recognizing the importance of public education and awareness in creating behavior change, the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative created the Regional Litter Prevention Campaign to target active litterers in the Potomac Watershed. This public education and social marketing campaign is designed to raise awareness and understanding of the issue of litter, change attitudes and perceptions, and persuade people to stop littering.

After several years of social research to create messaging and images, the Regional Litter Prevention Campaign was piloted in 2011 with grassroots outreach strategies in the community of Deanwood, DC and through a broader jurisdictional approach in Montgomery County, Fairfax County, Arlington County, the District of Columbia, and Prince George's County. Grassroots efforts have now expanded to eight different communities in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the Litter Campaign, the Alice Ferguson Foundation piloted a new evaluation technique in 2013 using direct observations of pedestrians.



Measuring Impact: Pilot Evaluation

To evaluate the Litter Campaign, the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative (Trash Initiative) conducted 28 observation sessions at four sites in Prince George's County, MD in 2013. The sites included a recreation center, a shopping center, a bus stop, and a metrorail station. Two observation sessions were done at each site prior to posting Litter Campaign materials and two observations were done every two months at each site for the remainder of the year after the materials were posted within a block of the sites. Each observation session lasted three hours and surveyed a 50x10m length of sidewalk. In total 4,686 pedestrians were recorded during these sessions along with their littering behaviors.



Results

A positive correlation was shown between posted Litter Campaign materials and a reduction in littering behaviors. There was a 45% reduction in the number of people littering after Litter Campaign materials were posted, declining from 1.32% to 0.75% of the pedestrians observed, excluding those littering tobacco products and pieces of food (figure 1).*

Positive behavior also rose dramatically after the Litter Campaign was in place; the number of people who put their trash in a litter can rose from 0.48% to 2.12% of pedestrians observed, a 77% increase, excluding those who disposed of food scraps and tobacco products. These items were excluded to be consistent with the results reported above and because a cigarette receptacle was put in place at one of the locations.

The Litter Campaign affected a range of age groups, but had the largest impact on those within the 31-40 age range. Youth and young adults were both the least affected by the Campaign and the most likely to litter. Social setting did not seem to influence littering behavior; litterers were equally likely to litter in a group setting as they were if they were alone or with other people in close proximity.

The Trash Initiative will continue using this method to evaluate the Litter Campaign to determine further effects. Additional work will be done to better target youth and young adults and spread the Campaign throughout the region.

*Tobacco products and pieces of food were excluded, including items such as cigarette butts and sunflower seeds, as the social norms associated with them were not specifically addressed by the Litter Campaign. If these items are included, there is still a reduction in the number of people littering, but it is closer to 5%.

Take Action

The Litter Campaign toolkit was created to be used by partners and is available to use at no cost. The toolkit contains a variety of visual, communication, and community resources ranging from planning guides to billboards. Local groups and governments can request to have their logo added to posters and other visuals at no cost. Assess the toolkit at trashfreepotomac.org

Three simple ways you can take action include:

- Hang a [poster](#) on your favorite community bulletin board.
- Spread the word about preventing litter through your listserves or on social media using [e-blasts](#).
- [Host a cleanup](#) and invite your elected official to attend with our [elected officials letter](#).

The Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF) is a non-profit organization chartered in the state of Maryland. Its mission is to connect people to the natural world, sustainable agricultural practices and the cultural heritage of their local watershed through education, stewardship and advocacy. Learn more about AFF at www.fergusonfoundation.org.

Less People Are Littering

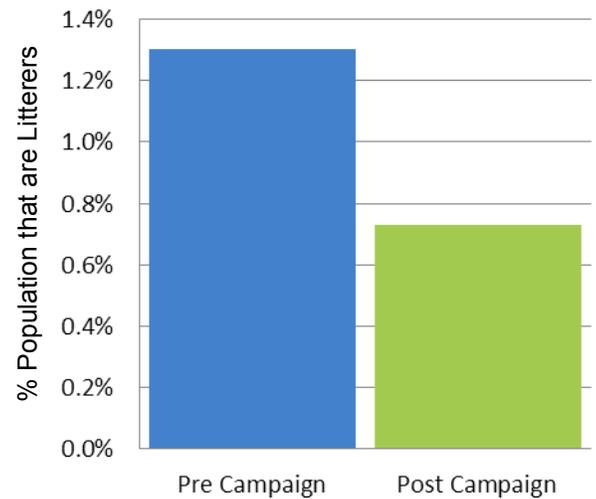


Figure 1. Changes in littering behavior due to use of the Regional Litter Prevention Campaign. Data does not include tobacco products and food scraps.

What is Being Littered?

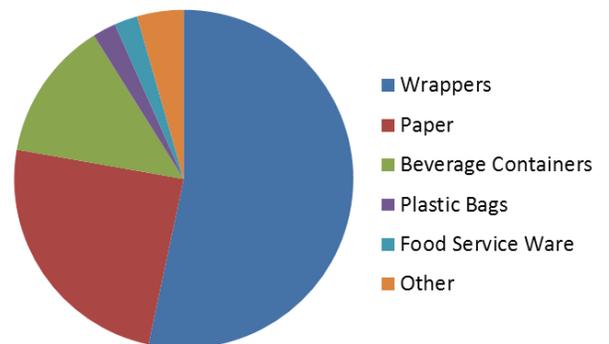


Figure 2. Types of Items Littered throughout the evaluation. Items in the “other” category include items too small to be identified.

