

2009 Litter Attitudes and Behavior Survey

Executive Summary

Background

EnviroMedia Social Marketing (EnviroMedia) commissioned Stadia Marketing (Stadia) to conduct the 2009 Litter Attitudes and Behaviors (LA&B) survey on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The LA&B is conducted every two years to gauge the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of Texans with regard to littering. To assess change over time, questions from previous studies (1998, 2001, 2005, and 2007) were replicated in 2009, and the study's scope was expanded to include additional questions.

A total of 1,255 Texas residents were surveyed via an online questionnaire or telephone interview in December 2009. The sample was stratified by region, gender, age, and ethnicity to ensure adequate representation of the entire Texas population.

Key Findings

Campaign Awareness

- Awareness of the "Don't Mess with Texas" campaign remains high at 95%, which is comparable to the 96% awareness level measured in the 2007 LA&B.
- Texans have a clearer understanding of what "Don't Mess With Texas" means. Eighty-two percent of respondents recall the correct litter prevention message (compared to 68% in 2007).

Litter Behavior

Definitions:

Litterer: someone who has ever littered or been around someone who littered.

- When compared to the 2007 study, the definition of a litterer in 2009 expanded to include individuals who either accidentally littered or had been with someone who accidentally littered.

Recent Litterer: someone who has littered or been around someone who littered in the past three months.

Active Litterer: Someone who has littered in the last month.

- Using the same definition for Litterers and Recent Litterers as the 2007 LA&B study, the incidence of Litterers is unchanged at 74% in 2009, while the incidence of Recent Litterers declined significantly from 43% (2007) to 31% (2009).
- The addition of two new causes of litter in the 2009 study, namely "accidental litter" and "pick-up truck related litter," increases the incidence of Litterers in 2009 to 87% and the incidence of Recent Litterers to 41%.
- Active-Litterers: Four in 10 (42%) Texans admit to having personally littered in the past month. Note: there is no comparison to 2007 because there was no one-month time specification in previous studies.

- More than half (54%) of Active Litterers claim to have littered in the past month while driving or riding in a car. The other instances where litter is most common are: when trashcans cannot be located (22% of Active Litterers) and when walking or playing outside (18% of Active Litterers).
- Seven in 10 (69%) Texans admit to having littered “accidentally” at some point in their lives. About 30% admit to having littered “accidentally” in the past year.
- Half (50%) of Active Non Litterers are intolerant of litter and will draw the attention of a stranger who litters compared to 39% of Active Litterers.
- Texans’ claim their littering behavior would change if they knew about litter pickup costs and the quantity of litter on Texas roads, with more than 70% indicating these things are ‘very or somewhat likely’ to impact their littering behavior.
- More than one-third (35%) of Active Litterers suggest fines and stricter enforcement of litter laws would reduce litter behavior.

Understanding Tobacco Litter

- Six in 10 (62%) Texans who smoke indicate they or someone in the same vehicle has thrown a cigarette butt out the window “rather than keep a cigarette butt in the car.” This group has been classified as Tobacco Litterers.
- More than one-third (35%) of smokers claim to use ashtrays while driving.
- Virtually all smokers in Texas (92%), including those who claim to litter cigarette butts, agree that cigarette butts are litter. More than seven in 10 Texas smokers (69% of Tobacco Litterers, 77% Tobacco Non-Litterers agree “smokers who throw butts on the ground are acting irresponsibly.”
- Six in 10 (61%) Tobacco Litterers claim they would dispose of cigarette butts more responsibly if there were more avenues to do so.

Understanding Influence of Parents, Children

- Eighty-six percent of Texans believe parents and guardians have the greatest potential to teach their children to not litter.
- Incidence of Active Litterers is higher among those who had seen their parents litter (57%), when compared to incidence of Active Litterers among those who had not seen their parents litter (37%).

Almost all parents (93%) say they are likely to stop littering if their children ask them to.

Attitudinal Segments of Texans

Texans were placed into segments based on a statistical analysis of their responses to a series of attitudinal questions toward the environment, litter, laws, and life in general. These five distinct segments are described below:

- *Green Cosmopolitans (23% of Texans)* – This segment plays an active role in preserving the environment and tends to use “green,” recycled products. They believe that roadside litter is an important environmental issue and that those who litter are disgusting.

A segment with a lower percentage of Active Litterers (36%) than the overall population (42%), they are less tolerant of litter and more likely to say something to those who litter. This segment is

comprised of a higher proportion of the following: individuals 45 years or older, Anglo, high education, and high income levels.

- *Young Families (13% of Texans)* – This group thinks laws to prevent litter are enforced strictly. However, they believe that environmental issues are blown out of proportion and littering is okay as long as it is not done intentionally.

This segment has the least incidence of Active Litterers (35%), despite the fact they drive the most. A higher proportion of this group also claims to always carry a “litter bag” or a trashcan in their car. They are more likely to have children ages 0-11. This segment has a higher proportion of Hispanics, individuals with relatively lower education and income levels and Houstonians.

- *Working Moms (27% of Texans)* – These individuals are proud of the state government’s work to keep Texas beautiful, believe there are adequate laws to prevent littering, and that they are enforced strictly. They also try to be “green” in terms of what they use and consume.

This group has an average incidence of Active Litterers (38%), but is more likely to draw attention to anyone littering and teach their children not to litter. They have a higher proportion of working females with children, individuals from low-to middle income-level households, and individuals that are divorced.

- *Proud Environmental Skeptics (24% of Texans)* – This segment is proud of Texas and believes accumulated litter on roadways is a poor reflection on Texans. However, they also claim environmental issues are blown out of proportion.

A group with a higher-than-average incidence of Active Litterers (48%), they are also less likely to draw attention of strangers who litter. This segment is characterized by a higher presence of those who are married, Anglo, and have relatively high income levels.

- *Fun Loving Anti-Establishment (13% of Texans)* – This group is adventurous and thrill-seeking and believes environmental issues are blown out of proportion. They tend to think having fun is the whole point of life, unintentional litter is okay, there is no need to teach children litter prevention, and if others litter, it’s not their problem.

They have the highest incidence of Active Litterers (55%). Messages about government litter pickup costs and volumes have the least influence on this segment. This group is also least likely to draw attention to a person who litters. They are characterized by a higher presence of those who are young (16-34 years), male, Hispanic, singles, students, and from low-income households.