

2002 Hispanic Litter Survey Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a research study conducted by NuStats, in cooperation with Tuerff-Davis EnviroMedia and Creative Civilization, in February 2002 for the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on the topic of littering attitudes and behaviors of Texas Hispanics. The study was modeled after a similar one conducted in 1998 and 2001. Although a number of new variables were measured, the principal components of the study went unchanged, allowing for a comparative analysis between Texans at large and Texas Hispanics.

Littering is not a behavior many people would openly admit to doing, given that it is socially unacceptable and illegal. NuStats utilized a non-threatening approach to ask Texas Hispanics about littering behavior. These techniques, originally employed in the 1998 survey and replicated in 2001 and 2002, produced results that are both dramatic and revealing in their ability to tell the story of Texas Hispanics who engage in littering behavior. NuStats was able to elicit honest answers from Texas Hispanics—answers about their personal contribution to the tons of litter that end up on Texas roads each year, as well as their attitudes and suggestions about litter prevention.

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CURRENT BEHAVIOR

Thirty-two percent of adult Texas Hispanics admitted to littering either small or large items in the last three months.

9.0% of Texas Hispanics are Gross Litterers, 21.5% are Micro Litterers, and 66.5% are Reformed Litterers. This is a significant difference from the 39.3% of Texans at large that personally admitted to littering in the last three years.

PROFILE OF A LITTERER

The profile of a Hispanic litterer is similar, but not identical, to the litter profile identified in 2001. The typical Hispanic litterer in Texas is between the ages of 16 and 24, is bilingual, goes to bars/parties more than twice a week, and is male.

While not all bilingual male Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 24 that frequent bars or similar nighttime entertainment are guilty of littering, these demographics and lifestyle characteristics remain highly correlated with littering behavior in Texas. For example, 29% of Texas Hispanics under the age of 25 engaged in major (or “Gross”) littering in the 3 months prior to the survey versus only 22% of those 25 and older. The 2002 study finds that as Hispanic Texans grow older, their propensity to litter decreases somewhat. Of noteworthy importance, the majority of each age group of Texas Hispanics was classified as Reformed Litterers. This is a significant deviation from the 2001 data.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT LITTERING

The majority of Texas Hispanics think littering is a problem in Texas, and they have unique perceptions regarding the severity of litter items, the sources of highway litter, and the effectiveness of litter prevention messages.

When asked whether or not they viewed littering as a problem in the Lone Star State, 85% of Texas Hispanics confirmed that they do view littering in Texas as a problem. Similar to Texans at large, Texas Hispanics perceive beer cans and bottles as the most severe litter item on Texas roads; however, some of the most commonly found items (including Kleenex®, chip bags, and cigarette butts) were listed as least

severe. These data may suggest that Texas Hispanics perceive a relationship between the size of the actual item being littered and the severity of the littering behavior.

Texas residents hold solid ideas regarding who contributes the majority of the litter found on Texas highways. When asked to rank the perceived sources of litter in Texas, people consuming alcohol in cars was at the top of the list, and was followed by teenagers and people illegally dumping construction debris. The top perceived three litter sources listed by Texas Hispanics were identical to those listed by Texans at large in 2001. When Texas Hispanics were asked to rank the effectiveness of litter prevention messages, reminding people that the fine for littering was up to \$500 garnered the top position. Similar to 2001, messages that emphasize the financial penalties of littering seem to most effectively convey the message.

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Only about half of Texas Hispanics were aware of the Adopt-a-Highway Program. Non-English speaking Hispanics are much less aware than their English-speaking counterparts.

The Adopt-a-Highway program, sponsored by TxDOT, encourages community volunteerism to help pick up litter on highways. This nationwide program is one of the best known and most effective litter prevention efforts in the country. Only slightly more than half (54%) of Texas Hispanics were aware of this litter prevention program. This is a significant deviation from the 82% of Texans at large who were aware of the program in 2001. Interestingly, when language is taken into account, the data suggests that non-English speaking Texas Hispanics are much less aware of the program than their English-speaking counterparts. Three-fourths (73%) of unilingual English Hispanics and two-thirds (64%) of bilingual Hispanics had awareness of Adopt-a-Highway. In stark contrast, only one-fourth (28%) of unilingual Spanish Hispanics had awareness of the program.

LITTER PREVENTION ADS AND THE DMWT CAMPAIGN

Relative to Texans at large, Texas Hispanics are not as likely to recall litter prevention ads, nor are they as likely to identify the correct meaning of DMWT. Non-English speaking Hispanics are much less likely to recall litter prevention ads or identify the correct meaning of DMWT.

When Texas Hispanics were asked if they recalled any recent litter prevention advertisement, 42% had no ad recall whatsoever. The percentage of non-English speaking Hispanics that did not recall litter prevention ads was much higher than the percentage of English speaking Hispanics (61% and 33% respectively). When asked about their recall of specific DMWT ads, only 20% of Texas Hispanics immediately recalled DMWT ads (relative to 28% of Texans at large in 2001). Once again, the percentage of non-English speaking Hispanics that did not recall DMWT ads was much higher than the percentage of English speaking Hispanics (28% and 4% respectively).

Eighty percent of unilingual English Hispanics and 78% of bilingual Hispanics were able to correctly identify the meaning of DMWT: Don't Litter. Conversely, a much lower 61% of unilingual Spanish Hispanics correctly identified the meaning. The data suggests that a lack of a Hispanic targeted litter prevention campaign may contribute to the lower percentage of Hispanics, relative to Texans at large, that recall and understand current litter prevention campaigns. Moreover, the lack of a Hispanic targeted campaign may help explain the differences noted when comparing English and non-English speaking Hispanics.

The overwhelming majority of Texas Hispanics want to see the DMWT campaign continued because they think it serves its purpose.

Ninety-five percent of Texas Hispanics want to see the current DMWT litter prevention campaign continued. When language spoken at home is taken into account, this percentage does not fluctuate significantly. These data suggests a high level of DMWT support across all Hispanic language segments. When asked the reason for their overwhelming support, nearly two-thirds (63%) commented that they believed the message is effective or it is needed to remind people not to litter.

CONCLUSION

The Don't Mess with Texas public education campaign has a long history of success in the state, both for its use of well-known spokespersons and for its tough stance on litter. Given the higher percentage of Hispanics that self-reported littering behavior, the low recall levels of the DMWT litter prevention ads, and the percentage of Hispanics with whom the litter prevention message is not resonating, we believe that a well-devised Hispanic targeted Don't Mess with Texas litter prevention campaign could help educate Texas Hispanics and act as a means to gradually alter currently held Hispanic attitudes and behaviors regarding littering.

As for the campaign theme, we recommend that the ads emphasize both the litter prevention messages associated with DMWT and the penalty and consequences of littering while targeting the profile of a Hispanic litterer presented in this report. In light of the linguistic diversity characteristic of Texas Hispanics, we recommend that the campaign be conducted in both Spanish and English. By doing so, both bilingual Hispanics, who contribute a higher percentage of Gross and Micro Litterers than any other language group, and unilingual Spanish Hispanics, who are characterized by low recall and low understanding of the current messages, will be able to fully absorb the litter prevention campaign. Since the data suggest that unilingual Spanish Hispanics have a very low awareness of the Adopt-a-Highway Program, a Spanish language Adopt-a-Highway campaign should also be considered. We also recommend that special care be taken to craft messages that clearly communicate the fact that even small items, such as cigarette butts, are litter.

A strong Hispanic targeted campaign, coupled with the current high levels of Hispanic support for the DMWT campaign, may have a synergistic effect and cause a change in Hispanic social behavior.