

2001 Litter Attitudes and Behaviors Study Fact Sheet

METHODOLOGY

This report documents a statewide telephone survey conducted by Tuerff-Davis EnviroMedia Inc. and NuStats International of Austin for the Texas Department of Transportation. The survey assessed Texans' littering attitudes and behaviors, and documented how these attitudes and behaviors have changed since 1998 when a similar study was conducted.

The survey, which was conducted March 1, 2001, included 868 residents of Texas. Sampled households were selected at random from a geographically balanced sample, stratified by area code, that consisted of listed and unlisted telephone numbers. Adults over age 16 and residing in a Texas household with telephone service were eligible. The study was conducted with a sample size at the 95% confidence level and a +/- 3% margin of error.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Forty percent of Texans admit to littering in the past three years even though it's illegal and they can be fined up to \$500 for the dirty offense. The overall number of Texans who admitted to littering in the 2001 study is virtually identical to 1998. However, Texans in 2001 are less likely to have littered recently (within the last three months).

LITTERING BEHAVIOR

Using a breakthrough approach originally employed in 1998, the 2001 survey revealed that over half of all Texans self-reported either littering or being tolerant of littering behavior by others. The research also revealed the state's worst litterers continue to be young adults (males and females age 16-24).

For purposes of this study, adult Texans can be classified in the following ways:

- **Gross Litterers:** These people first admitted they were involved in littering in the past three months and then admitted to personally discarding certain “major” items, such as cans, bottles and tire debris. These people account for 5.1 percent of adult Texans (a 2.2 percent decrease since 1998).
- **Micro Litterers:** These people first admitted they were involved in littering in the past three months and then admitted to personally discarding certain “minor” items, such as cigarette butts, candy wrappers and paper (like receipts). This group makes up 14.2 percent of adult Texans (virtually identical to 1998).
- **Reformed Litterers:** These people admitted they were involved in littering (either Gross or Micro) more than three months ago, but within the past three years. This group accounts for 20 percent of adult Texans (a 3.3 percent increase since 1998).
- **Litter Tolerators:** The people in this group have not personally littered recently but have friends or associates who have littered. They are called tolerant because they have not taken (and are not likely to take) actions to thwart littering. This group comprises about 12 percent of the adult Texas population (a 4.7 percent decrease since 1998).
- **Militant Non-Litterers:** People in this group either have not personally littered and have taken (or are likely to take) actions to thwart littering when they see it occur. This group represents 48.7 percent of all adult Texans (a 3.6 percent increase since 1998).

AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Using statistical models, certain demographic and lifestyle characteristics were correlated with littering behavior. The predictors were virtually identical in the 1998 and 2001 studies. These characteristics include (in order):

- Age (24 and under)
- Smoking cigarettes
- Going to bars or other nighttime entertainment at least twice a week
- Being single (unmarried)
- Eating fast food at least two times a week

Overall, young people?24 and under?are more likely to be Gross or Micro Litterers than are adults over 24. In this age group, there is no significant difference between males and females or among ethnicities when it comes to littering small items.

SMOKERS

Of those Texans who smoke, more than one-half admit to littering, especially small items like cigarette butts. Four percent are Gross Litterers, 24 percent are Micro Litterers and 24 percent are Reformed Litterers.

FREQUENTERS OF FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

Texans who typically eat fast food in their vehicles are more than three times as likely to be Gross Litterers and more than twice as likely to be Micro Litterers than those who eat at home.

TEXANS ON-THE-GO

Nearly 70 percent of people who personally admit to littering say the behavior occurred while driving.

TEXANS' VIEWPOINTS ON LITTER

- Texans continue to incorrectly believe prisoners (more than any other group) are responsible for picking up litter from Texas roadsides. In fact, private contractors are paid to clean up 90 percent of Texas roadways.
- Texans' understanding of the Adopt-a-Highway program has increased significantly since 1998. In 2001, 53 percent of adults in Texas know the program has something to do with volunteers picking up litter on roads (compared to 28 percent in 1998).
- Ninety-five percent of all Texans are aware of the "Don't Mess with Texas" slogan and 90% want to see the Texas Department of Transportation continue the campaign to stop people from littering.
- Fifty-two percent of Texans believe the Don't Mess with Texas campaign stops people from littering, compared to 36 percent in 1998.
- More than three-fourths (76 percent) of Texans know the Don't Mess with Texas slogan means "Don't Litter" (a 13 percent increase from 1998).

To help reduce litter, Texans gave their opinions on the most effective messages they endorse for a public education campaign:

Remind people littering is illegal and the fine is up to \$500 for trashing Texas. The fine for dumping items more than 5 pounds is up to \$2,000. Include litter prevention material in driver's education and license information. Produce more ads with new people in them.

Texans still believe using an altruistic approach, or a sense of social responsibility — telling people “It’s the right thing to do” — would be the least effective message.

NuStats