

Q & A April 16, 2014

Q. What is the current situation regarding litter in Union County?

A. People are still throwing it out and we are still picking it up! Unfortunately, the litter problem is still with us although we don't have as many complaints as we used to. Hopefully, some people may have gotten the message that littering is NOT COOL. We still have county crews and volunteers picking up litter and we still have our litter hotline for reporting people who litter (706-439-6025). One day a few weeks ago someone emailed us a picture they had taken with their smartphone of a truck with trash blowing out of the bed for several miles on Blue Ridge Hwy. The majority of litter on our roadways blows out of the beds of trucks. This is in direct violation of Union County Ordinance O-99-003.

Q. What is the fine for littering?

A. The Union County Ordinance states that violation of the litter law "shall be punishable as a misdemeanor by the imposition of a fine not to exceed \$1,000, by imprisonment in the county jail for a period of time not to exceed 60 days, or by both such fine and imprisonment, or up to the limits of any penalty provided by state law for the violation of such ordinance."

Q. How much does littering cost the county?

A. It is hard to come up with a dollar figure but I'm sure when you count time and labor spent on cleaning up other people's trash that it would be in the tens of thousands per year. The Georgia Department of Transportation spends about \$14 million annually to clean up roadside trash and local governments spend hundreds of thousands more dollars to keep litter off of 96,818 miles of locally-maintained roads. The sad thing is that this is just throwing money away on litter that could be better spent other places. Just imagine how much food could be bought to feed hungry people with that \$14 million.

Q. What else can the county do to combat this problem?

A. We have always been serious about litter but we are about to get even tougher. We will be starting a campaign to crack down on litter and we encourage everyone to help us by being observant and vigilant about reporting people who are littering. Remember that littering costs you, the taxpayer, because the money spent on litter is basically coming out of your pocket. Not only do we have to use tax dollars to clean it up but littering could also cost the county jobs. Who wants to move to a county or locate a business in a county with litter all over the place? The house you get to build is because another person has realized how wonderful our county is to live in and keeping it looking beautiful is a responsibility we all share. The job lost because of littering may be your own if you are guilty of littering.

Q. Do you have any litter survey facts?

- Three out of four Georgia motorists say they have seen trash thrown out of a vehicle, yet only one in 10 admit to littering from their vehicle.
- Eight out of 10 motorists believe people litter because it is easier than saving trash to discard later.
- Each Georgia resident disposes of approximately 6.3 pounds of trash each day.
- Litter in neighborhoods can result in property values being lowered by as much as 15 percent.

- Eighteen percent of all littered items end up in our streams and waterways as pollution.
- Cigarette litter represents more than 20 percent of the litter collected in many community clean-up initiatives.
- The most commonly found items during roadside litter clean-ups are cigarette butts, fast food wrappers, cups and aluminum cans.

Q. So what is the answer to the litter problem?

A. I believe education is the key! And it starts with the children. If we can start early enough to educate that littering is a bad idea then maybe eventually littering will end. We currently have an education program in place through the North Georgia Resource Management Authority (www.ngrma.org) of which Union County is a part. Leslie George, Executive Assistant and Ashley Rubio, Community Outreach Coordinator, do an excellent job of going into the schools and educating children about litter and other environmental issues. Not just children, but everyone needs to become more aware and responsible. Keep a bag in your car to put your trash in and at the end of the day throw it away responsibly.

Q. What can each citizen do to combat the litter problem?

A. There are many ways each individual can help such as making a point to pick up one piece of litter every day. If you are in a park or other public place and see litter, pick it up and throw it in the trashcan. You never know when your example will make an impression on someone else.

If you haul materials in the back of a truck, be sure to cover your load. Remember, it is against the law not to cover your load. Much of the litter on our roadways is accidentally blown out of the back of trucks.

Carry a litterbag in your car. Try reusing your plastic grocery bags. They make great car litterbags.

If you are a smoker, use a proper ashtray or trash receptacle to dispose of your cigarettes. **CIGARETTE BUTTS ARE LITTER!**

Litter Hotline #: 706-439-6025