

Litter factsheet for primary school teachers

We've put together a list of useful facts you can use to plan a lesson about litter prevention. It covers all the answers to the questions in our litter quiz.

What is litter?

- Litter is rubbish in the wrong place. That means any rubbish that's not put in a bin or recycling box.
- Flytipping is the name given to large amounts of rubbish, usually dumped from a car or van.

How big is Scotland's litter problem?

Each year, Scotland's cleaning teams collect **15,000 tonnes of litter**. That's:

- the same weight as **50 individual Kelpies**.
- around **250 million items of litter**.
- enough to fill **570,000 wheelie bins**.
- around **50 pieces of litter for every person in Scotland** (on average).
- **475 items dropped every minute** (on average).

Who drops litter?

- Most litter in Scotland is dropped by pedestrians.
- Studies suggest that half of all Scots have littered at least once.

Why do people litter?

Here are just some of the excuses people give for littering:

- "The place is already full of litter so it doesn't matter if I add a bit more"
- "Someone else will clean up after me – that's their job"
- "I can't see a bin so there's nowhere to put my rubbish except on the ground"
- "Litter isn't a big deal, it doesn't harm anyone"
- "I don't care about litter, it doesn't affect me"

Whose problem is litter?

It's everyone's responsibility to make sure they put their rubbish in a bin or recycling box.

Smoking-related litter

- This is the most common kind of litter in Scotland.
- Smoking-related litter includes things like cigarette butts and packets.

Gum litter

- It costs around **3p to buy a piece of gum** – and **10p to clean it up** when it's littered.
- Gum litter removal uses expensive equipment and dangerous chemicals.

Why does litter matter?

- Each year, Scotland spends at least **£46 million on clean-up**.
- This money could be spent on schools, hospitals, roads and other local services.
- Some litter can injure people and animals.
- Food waste can attract unwanted wildlife, including rats.

How long does litter take to break down?

- **Paper bag** = up to 1 month.
- **Plastic bag** = up to 20 years.
- **Cigarette butts** = up to 12 years.
- **Plastic bottle** = up to 450 years to break into small pieces, never breaks down completely.
- **Glass bottle** = never breaks down.
- **Chewing gum** = never breaks down.

Some people think it's fine to litter their fruit waste. But it's not.

How long does it actually take for fruit waste to break down?

- **Banana skin** = up to 2 years.
- **Orange peel** = up to 2 years.

What happens to a grown-up if they get caught littering?

- They could get an **£80 fine** straight away.
- If they don't pay, they could be prosecuted and made to **pay up to £2,500**.
- If they're caught flytipping, they could be **fined up to £40,000**.

Lots of our litter could be recycled

If something can be recycled, it's worth money. If we collected up all Scotland's litter to be recycled, **we could make around £1.2 million**. How would you spend that money to help people and wildlife?