



**TDOT**  
Department of  
Transportation

# 2022



# Litter Grant Annual Report



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Transportation

# Annual Litter Grant Report

March 31, 2022

# Table of Contents

Reducing Litter in Tennessee..... 4

Program Revenues..... 5

Litter Grant..... 6

FY 2022 Litter Funding Distribution by County..... 8

Litter Hotline..... 9

Keep Tennessee Beautiful.....10

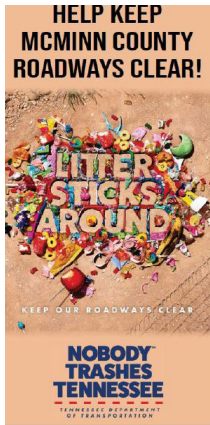
Adopt-A-Highway..... 13

Nobody Trashes Tennessee..... 15

Program Priorities..... 17

Conclusion..... 23

# Reducing Litter in Tennessee



Reducing litter is critical to keeping roadways safe, promoting healthy and vibrant communities, and maintaining the natural scenic beauty of Tennessee. Through funding made possible by Tennessee's Soft Drink and Malt Beverage industries, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) provides comprehensive litter prevention programs, and much-needed services, that deeply impact Tennesseans daily. TDOT's program partners, investigate crime, maintain equipment, restore habitats, expand recycling, teach students and more by partnering with these programs.

A common theme throughout the programs listed in this report is educating the public concerning litter behavior, the harmful effects of litter, and support for litter pickup operations. TDOT's programs are nationally acclaimed, having won multiple awards from Keep America Beautiful, and are innovative, yet proven strategies for how best to amplify the efforts of local governments, non-profits, community groups and volunteers. TDOT is invested in preventing, abating, and picking up litter throughout Tennessee. Annually, the department spends more than \$19 million on the programs found in this report and right-of-way litter pickup contracts.

This annual report is required by law to be updated and issued every March 31st to serve as public record for the collection and use of funds under TDOT's Litter Grants and associated programs. Traditionally, the annual report is linked to Fiscal Year financial activity and program performance (beginning July 1st and ending June 30th). For this year's report, additional activity and performance information has been included through the end of the Calendar Year, (December 31, 2021). This added information provides a narrative and program data closer to the report's publish date.

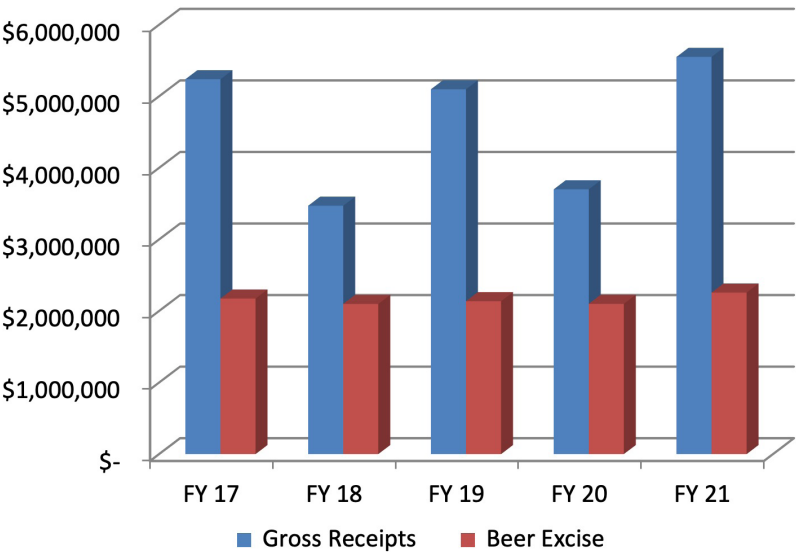


# Program Revenues

In 1981, the Soft Drink and Malt Beverage Industries took a comprehensive, proactive approach to prevent their bottles and other trash from becoming litter along Tennessee roadways. As good corporate citizens, the industry lobbied to establish a tax on their products to help fund litter prevention throughout Tennessee. The tax revenues, from the gross receipts of soft drink sales and the production of a barrel of beer are codified in TCA § 67-4-402 and TCA § 57-5-201 respectively, and have provided TDOT with a dependable revenue source which has steadily grown over time. For Fiscal Year 2020-2021, TDOT received a total of \$7,807,259.98, which is broken down in the table below.

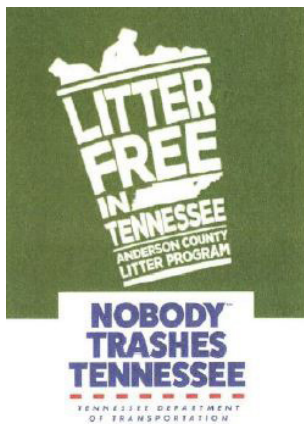
Revenues that come to TDOT are dedicated for the specific purpose of litter prevention, abatement, and education. Unspent revenues are returned to a fund separate from the Highway Trust Fund and used to fund projects such as the Nobody Trashed Tennessee campaign and Special Litter Grants, which are offered every few years. Special Litter Grants were last issued in 2017. The laws also allow TDOT discretion on how to best use the revenues to clean up and prevent litter, and matters related to litter. In recent years, this has meant expanded support for waterway cleanups and support for local recycling programs. Over time, additional programs have been added (Keep Tennessee Beautiful, Litter Hotline, Adopt-A-Highway) which have all been supported by these revenues.

Table 2: Actual Revenues



# Litter Grant

Since 1983, TDOT has joined forces with all 95 county governments to offer Litter Grants which subsidize local pickup operations and enhance litter prevention education resources across Tennessee. \$5.5 million is annually allocated to Litter Grants statewide, a total which has remained the same since 2017. The amount each county receives is based on a formula accounting for population and road miles. The current series of Litter Grant contracts includes \$3,842,937 for local litter pickup operations, and \$1,657,063 for litter prevention education. Litter Grant contracts require that between 20% and 35% of each county's total funding be budgeted for litter prevention education efforts. Counties are required to tackle litter prevention education in three of five designated categories: students, public, media, government, and business. The fact that 76% of the funds in this category were spent means that citizens across Tennessee gained valuable knowledge about how litter impacts our quality of life, economic development, and the environment.



**"Adopt" an  
Anderson  
County Road  
and help  
keep us litter-  
free!**

Visit [www.litterfreeintennessee.org/  
adopt-a-road/](http://www.litterfreeintennessee.org/adopt-a-road/) or call the County  
Mayor's Office at (865) 457-6200 to  
learn more.

In addition to grant funds, the positive impact of TDOT's Litter Grants are amplified through local government partners who invest additional resources and the citizens who contribute tens of thousands of volunteer hours to promote these efforts. Litter Grants are extremely efficient, as they save communities and the State of Tennessee millions of dollars. The 2021 statewide average cost of a Litter Grant pickup is just \$11.95 per mile.

Litter Grants are a familiar program in many Tennessee communities. Roadside signs with creative litter prevention messaging, students routinely earn volunteer hours through spring cleanup events, and local newspapers frequently run ads for litter art contests.

Describing Litter Grant's impact in Sevier County, Ms. Lisa Bryant, Executive Director of Keep Sevier Beautiful, noted: "TDOT's Litter Grant has become a central resource for us. It has allowed us to broaden our reach and provide anti-litter programming for students in the Sevier County school system. Last year we reached 14,500 students."

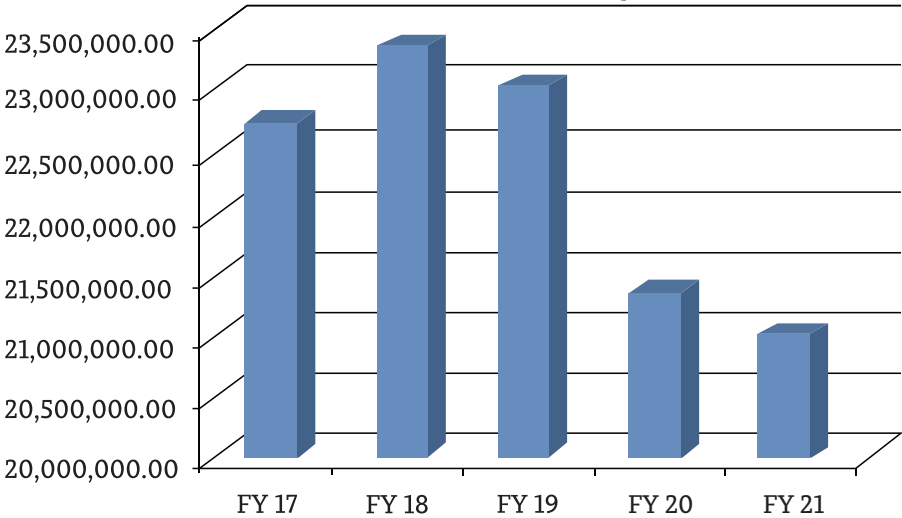
"TDOT's Litter Grant has also allowed us to organize litter events throughout the year on our roadways and riverways, many times teaming up with the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. This grant provides adequate supplies for our safe and fun community events. "We currently have an active database of over 1,000 volunteers who assist with these projects throughout the year. Because of the volunteer opportunities we are able to provide through this Grant, Keep Sevier Beautiful has become a staple in Sevier County for student community service hours as well as all others just looking to volunteer."

# Litter Grant (continued)

Litter Grant programs deliver solid, efficient service for Tennessee. Throughout the 38-year history (1983-2021) of TDOT's Litter Grant programs, county governments have removed an average of 11,243 tons of litter each year. This equates to the removal of more than 428,200 tons of litter from Tennessee roadsides and communities. Annualized pounds and tonnage collected is displayed in the two tables below. Overall, tonnage has been reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Litter Removal by Fiscal Year				
Fiscal Year	Pounds Collected	US Tons	Pounds Recycled	% of Pounds Collected Recycled
FY 17	22,724,846.40	11,362.43	9,079,869.20	40.0
FY 18	23,358,360.09	11,679.18	9,259,118.55	39.6
FY 19	22,987,734.31	11,493.87	7,809,911.00	34.0
FY 20	21,232,819.41	10,616.41	7,585,240.92	35.7
FY 21	20,547,662.20	10,273.83	7,949,094.80	38.8

Pounds of Litter Removed by Fiscal Year



Despite COVID-related impacts to tonnage collected, several other Litter Grant performance measures have indicated continued success. In FY 2021, recycled items accounted for 38.7% of the total tonnage collected statewide. This meant a large volume of waste was not only picked up but was diverted from landfills and invested into local recycling programs. For the past several years, county governments have honed in on the cleanup of illegal dumpsites. 4,023 illegal dumpsites were cleaned up during FY 2021, an increase of more than 300 sites over the previous term. This amount of increase is a multiyear statewide trend among Litter Grantees.



# FY 2022 Litter Funding Distribution by County

This is a list of funds granted to Tennessee county governments for litter pickup, abatement and prevention education activities during the Fiscal Year 2021-2022.

FY 2022 Litter Funding Distribution by County					
Anderson	\$53,000.00	Hamilton	\$127,100.00	Morgan	\$44,200.00
Bedford	\$51,500.00	Hancock	\$44,200.00	Obion	\$49,600.00
Benton	\$44,200.00	Hardeman	\$46,500.00	Overton	\$44,800.00
Bledsoe	\$44,200.00	Hardin	\$48,600.00	Perry	\$44,200.00
Blount	\$74,200.00	Hawkins	\$56,700.00	Pickett	\$44,200.00
Bradley	\$64,900.00	Haywood	\$44,200.00	Polk	\$44,200.00
Campbell	\$48,700.00	Henderson	\$49,200.00	Putnam	\$59,200.00
Cannon	\$44,200.00	Henry	\$52,000.00	Rhea	\$44,200.00
Carroll	\$49,300.00	Hickman	\$49,300.00	Roane	\$52,900.00
Carter	\$50,800.00	Houston	\$44,200.00	Robertson	\$56,300.00
Cheatham	\$44,200.00	Humphreys	\$44,200.00	Rutherford	\$113,200.00
Chester	\$44,200.00	Jackson	\$44,200.00	Scott	\$44,200.00
Claiborne	\$49,100.00	Jefferson	\$53,000.00	Sequatchie	\$44,200.00
Clay	\$44,200.00	Johnson	\$44,200.00	Sevier	\$69,300.00
Cocke	\$49,400.00	Knox	\$168,700.00	Shelby	\$269,200.00
Coffee	\$52,300.00	Lake	\$44,200.00	Smith	\$44,200.00
Crockett	\$44,200.00	Lauderdale	\$44,200.00	Stewart	\$44,200.00
Cumberland	\$63,100.00	Lawrence	\$58,500.00	Sullivan	\$84,900.00
Davidson	\$179,900.00	Lewis	\$44,200.00	Sumner	\$84,000.00
Decatur	\$44,200.00	Lincoln	\$52,200.00	Tipton	\$53,600.00
DeKalb	\$44,200.00	Loudon	\$49,100.00	Trousdale	\$44,200.00
Dickson	\$54,200.00	Macon	\$44,200.00	Unicoi	\$44,200.00
Dyer	\$48,200.00	Madison	\$64,800.00	Union	\$44,200.00
Fayette	\$51,600.00	Marion	\$44,200.00	Van Buren	\$44,200.00
Fentress	\$44,200.00	Marshall	\$44,700.00	Warren	\$50,300.00
Franklin	\$50,600.00	Maury	\$67,200.00	Washington	\$72,000.00
Gibson	\$58,700.00	McMinn	\$55,700.00	Wayne	\$46,000.00
Giles	\$52,600.00	McNairy	\$47,900.00	Weakley	\$53,900.00
Grainger	\$44,200.00	Meigs	\$44,200.00	White	\$44,200.00
Greene	\$68,400.00	Monroe	\$53,600.00	Williamson	\$93,500.00
Grundy	\$44,200.00	Montgomery	\$83,700.00	Wilson	\$76,100.00
Hamblen	\$48,200.00	Moore	\$44,200.00	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,500,000.00</b>

# Litter Hotline



Tennesseans care about preserving the scenic beauty of their communities. TCA § 54-1-401 authorizes TDOT to establish a system for citizens to report acts of littering from motor vehicles.

When citizens notify TDOT of a littering incident, a letter is mailed to the registered owner of the vehicle along with a Nobody Trashes Tennessee car trash bag or portable ashtray and other litter prevention information.

The letter gently reprimands offenders by discouraging litter behavior and informing them that littering is against the law and punishable by a fine.

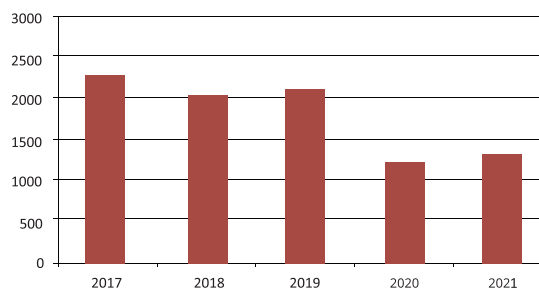
The entire program is anonymous. Records are not kept regarding individuals who make the report or those receiving a letter. The Citizens Litter Prevention Hotline is an educational tool to remind those who engage in littering that their actions are hurtful to the state and to their community.

TDOT maintains the toll-free hotline at 1-877-8-LITTER or (877-854-8837), as well as an online form ([www.tn.gov/tdot/environmental-home/environmental-highway-beautification-office/litter.html](http://www.tn.gov/tdot/environmental-home/environmental-highway-beautification-office/litter.html)) for residents to report acts of littering. Information necessary to report a littering incident includes:

- License plate number (Tennessee plate only)
- Type and make of the vehicle
- Day and time the incident occurred
- Location where the incident occurred
- Type of item tossed or blown from the vehicle

Litter Hotline Reports by Fiscal Year	
Year	Reports
2017	2,272
2018	2,051
2019	2,137
2020	1,251
2021	1,346

Table 5: Litter Hotline Reports



# Keep Tennessee Beautiful

Keep Tennessee Beautiful (KTnB) is an adjunct service of the University of Memphis and provides expertise in litter prevention education, litter law enforcement, community enhancement through beautification, and volunteer recruitment and management. TDOT spends a significant amount of money each year on litter pickup and prevention activities. In order to reduce those costs over time, Tennesseans must recognize the negative impacts on the scenic beauty of Tennessee, and the financial costs associated with litter.



In 2021, \$1,303,532 was awarded to KTnB to serve as the statewide affiliate for Keep America Beautiful (KAB), administer its own programming, and assist local-level KAB affiliates in 33 Tennessee communities. Additionally, the KTnB Advisory Council was established under Governor McWherter's Executive Order #18 in September 1989. The Council is comprised of 14 citizen appointees and ex-officio members from Tennessee State Departments. Appointed by the Governor, citizen members serve rotating terms and follow their by-laws for the betterment of Tennessee as an attractive, safe and healthy place to live and visit. Through policy advisement, the Council sets direction for KTnB and all local-level affiliates.

## ***Highlights of KTnB activities during Fiscal Year 2020 and 2021:***

- KTnB encouraged Tennesseans to work independently to fight litter, or safely by gathering in very small numbers for cleanups, as COVID took hold of the country during the Spring 2020. Safety precautions such as utilizing social distancing and masks were also encouraged. Another effort that was undertaken was a social media campaign encouraging multi-use masks and reduce the act of littering personal protective equipment. Local affiliates moved to a biweekly statewide call to help increase coordination and help them better lead their communities. KTnB also mailed out branded reusable masks to reinforce litter messaging and limit single-use mask wearing.
- A virtual Great American Cleanup Kickoff Event was held on March 5, 2021 in Grundy County. Governor Bill Lee proclaimed March 2021 as "Keep Tennessee Beautiful Month", and a special recognition and award was given to "Love Where You Live" recipient Ed Jordan of Carter County. A media briefing was held before the event, where KTnB staff reinforced the Great American Cleanup theme of "Trashercise Across Tennessee".
- "Trashercise Across Tennessee" is an opportunity to get fit and give back by collecting trash individually or hosting a small cleanup in a community. For safety precautions, KTnB recommended dividing groups of Trashercise



# Keep Tennessee Beautiful (continued)

volunteers into small teams of no more than five. Participants were encouraged to log the pounds of trash collected and their volunteer time through a virtual race app. A goal of hosting an event in all 95 counties was set. The success of past local Trashercise events in Leiper's Fork, Tennessee inspired KTnB to launch the program statewide. KTnB provided trash bags, safety vests, hand sanitizer, gloves, and t-shirts to all wanting to host Trashercise events in their communities.



- During spring 2021 KTnB provided technical and staff support to local affiliates for their key events. Memphis City Beautiful held a multi-month "Paint The Town Red" planting and beautification event between March and May. In honor of being the oldest Keep America Beautiful affiliate in the country, they encouraged community groups to plant red flowers. KTnB also donated tarps and staff time to Keep Tipton County Beautiful and Keep Chester County Beautiful for giveaways held in conjunction with local solid waste Household Hazardous Waste events.
- KTnB hosted its 3rd annual "Can You Dig This" beautification project during the fall 2020 and winter 2021, with the help of several local affiliates. "Can You Dig This" is a project for beautifying communities by planting native species and flowers, as well as improving recycling efforts by repurposing used tires and turning them into flower pots. "Can You Dig This" events were held in conjunction with Keep Blount Beautiful and Memphis City Beautiful.
- The TDOT/KTnB Biennial Conference took place virtually on September 22, 2021 and featured the coveted "Awards of Excellence". The event celebrated the successes of the year, and the keynote speaker was University of Memphis Men's Basketball Head Coach Penny Hardaway. 16 winners of "Awards of Excellence" took home awards and cash prizes totaling \$47,000 for their environmental stewardship.
- On October 26, 2021, Executive Director Missy Marshall served as a keynote speaker for the TN Environmental Conference, which was held virtually. Missy focused on upcoming volunteer opportunities, provided an overview of the KTnB program, and highlighted the history of local affiliate 'Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful'. She also stressed the importance of partnership between environmental programs and all state leaders.
- KTnB hosted its 5th annual "Ready. Set. Grow! 5K" throughout October 2021. The race was held virtually to



## Keep Tennessee Beautiful (continued)

ensure the safety of participants and to allow for guidelines of social distancing. The “Ready. Set. Grow! 5K” is a health awareness event to rally Tennesseans on keeping our state clean and beautiful. Participants completed the run at their own pace either on a treadmill, around their neighborhood, or any course of their choice. After completing the 5K, participants logged their results through the ‘ItsYourRace’ online results page.

- On November 15, 2021, KTnB partnered with the Tennessee Department of Tourism to observe “America Recycles Day” and handed out reusable car litter bags and reusable grocery bags at all 16 Tennessee Welcome Centers. 100 of each item were sent to centers, and staff were trained to promote reusable products to the travelling public. An “America Recycles Day” recycling pledge was also advertised as a way to engage the public and encourage recycling.
- In November 2021, KTnB was recognized at the KAB National Conference in Washington D.C. for the following awards: “Diamond Recognition” for over 10 years or more of being in good standing with KAB as a state leader; and two “State Affiliate Partnership” awards for work with TDOT and the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. Partnership awards were later presented to both state agencies at a luncheon.



# ADOPT- -HIGHWAY



In addition to partnerships and grants, TDOT administers the Adopt-A-Highway program so that all Tennesseans can do their part in combating litter in their communities. The all-free, all-volunteer program has been around since 1989, and is an excellent way for individuals, families, or groups of all sizes to give back.

Adopt-A-Highway is completely free for those who commit to cleaning up a TDOT-approved 2 mile stretch of roadside each quarter. Volunteers must be at least 12 years old and sign a waiver, at which point they are given plastic bags, caution signs and safety vests by the nearest TDOT district office. Participants in the program are rewarded with a free roadside recognition panel displaying their chosen message along the adopted route.

Adopt-A-Highway volunteers contribute a great deal to TDOT and to their communities.

Mr. James McAbee is the District Coordinator for Monroe, Blount, Loudon and Roane counties in east Tennessee. Mr. McAbee explains his enthusiasm for Adopt-A-Highway volunteers by saying: "I've been the Adopt-A-Highway coordinator for my area since 2005 and have seen volunteers remove several tons of unsightly litter from our Rights-Of-Way. I have gotten to meet a lot of volunteers in 17 years. These same folks have gotten to know me, and I them, and all of them have a real passion for keeping our communities clean."



## Adopt-A-Highway (continued)

TDOT recognizes one special Adopt-A-Highway group monthly with t-shirts and social media posts. On odd-numbered years, an Adopt-A-Highway group is recognized during the TDOT/KTnB Biennial Conference with an Award of Excellence and a cash prize. In September 2021, Cumberland County's Cumberland Homesteads Tower Association took home the honor. The Association diligently filled up hundreds of bags with litter during cleanups throughout the pandemic, and even created a Facebook group page to promote each cleanup event. Association members have found their experience in Adopt-A-Highway as meaningful and rewarding, especially when first time visitors and community residents recognize their hard work.

Volunteering with Adopt-A-Highway can really make an impact. The program reduces the millions of dollars TDOT spends on litter removal each year, and directly impacts every community. For more information, please visit <https://www.tn.gov/tdot/environmental-home/environmental-highway-beautification-office/adopt-a-highway.html>, or contact TDOT's Highway Beautification Office at (615) 741-2877.

Adopt-A-Highway Fiscal Year 2021 Impacts			
Bags of Litter Picked up	Pounds of Litter Removed	Volunteer Hours	Cleanup Volunteers
2,542	38,130 lbs	172	476



# Nobody Trashes Tennessee

Originally launched in June 2017, “Nobody Trashes Tennessee” is TDOT’s statewide litter prevention campaign which aims to raise awareness of litter behavior and spur Tennesseans to join a movement against litter. The campaign is rooted in Tennessee-specific research from 2016, consisting of a Litter Attitudes and Behavior questionnaire, Focus Group analysis from each of the four major metropolitan areas of the state, and a Visible Litter Study of items on roadsides across Tennessee. In April 2021, the campaign updated the Litter Attitudes and Behavior portion of research, as it hosted a series of online focus groups and public opinion polling events to gather data on the public’s understanding of litter topics and test new samples of creative materials. Data gathered from the events was compared against that which was similarly collected in 2016 and used in planning for the next phase of the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign. In total, 1,002 respondents from across the state took part in the virtual research events.

In August 2021, TDOT used the updated litter research to let litter do the talking. The campaign debuted “Talking Trash”, a series of interviews featuring a gregarious red cup and a grumpy food container PSAs. These :30 second memorable clips are styled as though the cup has a talk show and features a variety of “guests” who are litter experts and celebrity partners. The 19-episode initial season of “Talking Trash” includes guests ranging from Tennessee State University football coach Eddie George to a Tennessee State Trooper. Each episode is formatted especially for digital and social media dissemination and is tied to a recalibrated paid media approach.

In April 2021, the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign leveraged partnerships in Memphis and Chattanooga to earn media and promote an anti-litter message on behalf of Earth Day. The Tennessee Aquarium debuted a new exhibit focusing on litter in waterways, and cited facts from PSAs of the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign.



## Nobody Trashes Tennessee (continued)



In Memphis, 78 student athletes, coaches and administrators from the University of Memphis athletics department gathered to take part in a “Blue and Gray” day of service. Participants selected one of four routes near campus to cleanup, and significant media attention was earned. Traditionally, as weather turns colder and roadside mowing stops for the year, litter pickup wanes. To further public involvement with the campaign, and promote year-round cleanup events, TDOT announced a “No Trash November” mini campaign in October 2021. The mini-campaign was a

call to action amongst Adopt-A-Highway groups and TDOT’s Litter Grant partners. In addition to earning media and spreading awareness of Nobody Trashes Tennessee, 56 cleanups occurred statewide and netted 2,180 bags with 46,067 lbs. of litter removed from roadsides. The total far surpassing a publicized goal of removing 20,000 lbs.

Nobody Trashes Tennessee, as with all of TDOT’s litter prevention programming, is serviced by a statewide network of local partners, grantees and volunteers, who amplify the campaign’s efforts and reach. The campaign would not be a success without these continuing relationships.



# Program Priorities

## Connecting Litter to Water Quality

Litter travels. Objects originating inside a vehicle and littered along a roadside, are easily blown by wind or moved by a rain event from a ditch and into a local waterway. This degrades water quality, impacts wildlife, and harms those using waterways for commerce or recreation. KAB released a national litter study in April 2021 which measured a decrease in roadside litter, but an increase of litter in waterways. Nationally, the KAB study showed 26 billion pieces of litter in American waterways.



To combat this growing trend, TDOT joined with the U.S.D.A Forest Service, Keep Cleveland/Bradley County Beautiful and Tennessee Highway Patrol to host a series of cleanups of the Ocoee River Scenic Byway in November 2020. Volunteers conducted a much-needed roadside cleanup along the 26-mile National Scenic Byway. This included picking up around trailheads, put-in areas, and marina parking lots. A follow-up cleanup event of Parksville Lake was conducted by Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful in February 2021.

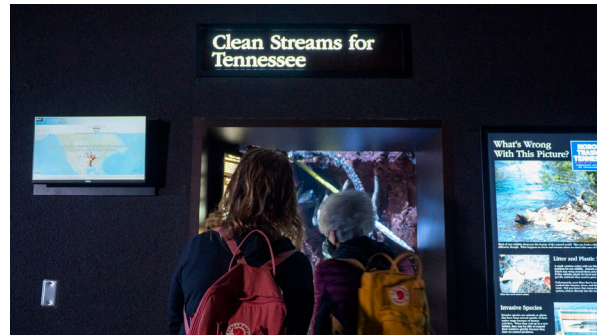


Also to combat this trend, and to protect Tennessee's prized waterways, TDOT has joined the Tennessee Valley Authority and other sponsors in funding several annual cleanups with Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful. Each all-volunteer cleanup event allows boat-born participants to spend the day removing litter from the main channel and shorelines of the Tennessee River and its tributaries. In 2021, Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful volunteers removed more than 125,000 pounds of litter. In August 2021, the group received an additional \$180,000 grant from TDOT to purchase and operate a network of Seabin® trash skimming devices at marinas and public areas. More information about Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful can be found at <https://www.keeptnriverbeautiful.org/>.



## Program Priorities (continued)

To educate the public about the presence of litter and microplastics, and how they negatively impact wildlife and water quality, TDOT joined forces with the Tennessee Aquarium to launch two new exhibits in April 2021. The exhibits, found in the 'River Journey' building of the aquarium complex, feature interactive elements, as well as facts and PSAs from the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign. Litter pulled from previous Tennessee River cleanups adorn the exhibits, which also feature a variety of invasive species found throughout Tennessee. In April 2022, TDOT and the Tennessee Aquarium will again join forces on a new litter exhibit. Both efforts are prominently featured within the aquarium and cement the connection between increased litter and degraded waterways.



## Program Priorities (continued)

### *Supporting Specific Community Needs*



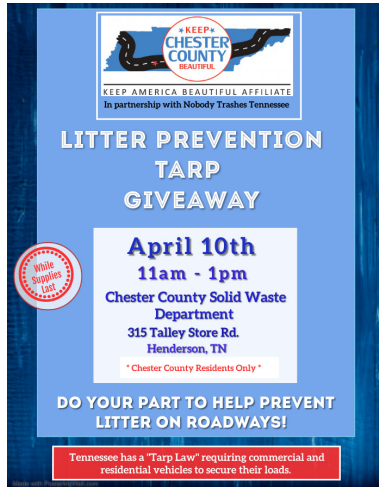
Local partnerships are at the heart of TDOT's comprehensive beautification programming. In 2021, TDOT partnered with two communities who started special projects using funding from their Litter Grant. These projects were instant successes and had a profound impact because they engaged the public broadly and met a commonly agreed upon community needs. For both special projects, TDOT offered additional non-grant help, in the form of technical assistance and by supplying materials.



Sequatchie County organized a special two-day cleanup in March 2021. The event was advertised through the Sequatchie County Chamber of Commerce and was initially billed solely as a cleanup and tire removal for nearby Coop's Creek. A call for 35 volunteers was also publicly advertised. When the event was finally held, on March 19-20, 2021, 136 volunteers responded. Event organizers divided the volunteers into four teams and created routes to be picked up. The event quickly turned into a community-wide cleanup and had involvement from groups such as the Sequatchie County High School Fishing Team and Tennessee Highway Patrol to VFW Post 5772 and employees from Mann + Hummel Manufacturing in Dunlap. At the end of the weekend, five single axle dump truck loads of litter was cleaned up, as were five 18-foot utility trailers of tires from Coop's Creek. TDOT provided extra support to Sequatchie County in coordinating the hauling and storage of the waste tires, as well as contributing the needed extra cleanup supplies.



## Program Priorities (continued)



During winter 2021, Chester County reviewed the results of their recently completed annual Litter Index. The 2020 index revealed again, what had become a consistent pattern, of littered roadways near the West Tennessee Recycling Hub and other convenience centers throughout the county. To combat this, community leaders decided to take a focused approach on covered loads and enforcement. County Mayor Barry Hutcherson issued a county-wide tarp policy in March 2021 that loads must be properly tied down before disposing of waste at all Chester County Solid Waste facilities. The policy was in keeping with Tennessee's Covered Load Law and was advertised locally. A tarp giveaway event was also planned in conjunction with Tennessee Highway Patrol and the Chester County Sheriff's Department for later that month. Due to the popularity of the event, Chester County

asked TDOT to assist with additional tarps for another event in April. Subsequently, an additional event was held on April 10, 2021. During the TDOT-supported event seven volunteers distributed tarps to residents of 150 households. As a result of the County's focus on covered loads, a reduction in litter was experienced. Between January 2021 and June 2021, collections by the county's full-time litter crew were reduced 52%, from 4.2 tons to 2.2 tons.



# Program Priorities (continued)

## *Thriving Despite Continuing Impacts from COVID-19*

The global spread of COVID-19 has had widespread impacts, including in every corner of the Volunteer State. These impacts have made more difficult both the delivery of litter prevention education programming, and the capacity for agencies and individuals to pick up roadside litter in their communities. In 2020, and as 2021 continued, local partners and TDOT worked closer than ever to find unique ways to continue educating the public and picking up litter. Throughout the pandemic, Litter Grant funding was a solution to an important problem across Tennessee.



Initially TDOT viewed COVID-19 as a serious hurdle to overcome in administration of the Litter Grant and in delivering statewide beautification services. The Litter Grant contract process was made electronic, as was annual grantee training. TDOT and Keep Tennessee Beautiful became increasingly concerned about a rise in illegal dumping, especially in communities that had cut solid waste services. A tips and tactics manual was created that was subsequently shared statewide through the Tennessee Sheriffs' Association. As time continued, COVID-19 began to have a definite impact on programming. With stay at home and socially distancing orders citizens used the Litter Hotline less. Larger, in-person cleanups associated with the

Great American Cleanup and Earth Day were postponed or cancelled, and since April 1, 2020, 42 of 95 Tennessee counties either paused or halted altogether their litter cleanup operations. TDOT's local partners also had to clear hurdles such as closed or remote schools, a lack of community events, labor issues, supply chain issues, and a lack of offenders being sentenced to community service. All of these significant challenges were on top of the threat of sickness posed by the COVID-19 virus.

Despite these hurdles and challenges, innovative practices and partnerships have helped local litter prevention programs to rise to the challenge. TDOT, Keep Tennessee Beautiful and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation joined forces to share traditional and social media messaging about Personal-Protective Equipment (PPE) litter. Adopt-A-Highway cleanups resumed in spring 2021, after an 11-month hiatus, with a new bevy of COVID-19 safety proposals in place. Counties were allowed to request reimbursement for new, expanded services being offered at convenience centers. Litter prevention education programs were developed for a remote-learning audience, and multiple counties moved to a "micro-cleanup" approach with only a few individuals involved, wearing proper PPE and being social distanced. Litter pickups and litter prevention education programs were severely impacted by the spread of COVID-19 but innovated to rise to the challenge.

# Program Priorities (continued)

## *Servicing Distressed Counties*

The Litter Grant program has provided funding for communities in all Tennessee counties to perform neighborhood and highway litter pickups, litter prevention education and beautification. Since 1983, Tennessee has invested in the Litter Grant because the program directly impacts local economies, including economic and tourist development, and business recruitment. These impacts are particularly important for the 9 counties in the state that are identified as “economically distressed.” All of these 9 counties contain a National Scenic Byway, designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation, which bring visitors and added economic impact. Clean roadsides, scenic viewsheds and litter-free communities are necessities for a positive visitor experience on these routes.

Economically distressed counties received a total of \$402,800 in TDOT Litter Grant funding during Fiscal Year 2020-2021. Communities in these counties removed a total of 672,842 pounds of litter from Tennessee roadways and committed vital volunteer hours to improve their local economy.

TDOT is proud of all its 95 local partners in the statewide Litter Grant. The highlights listed below are in specific recognition of the economically distressed counties working to both beautify their communities and spark economic investment to improve the lives of Tennesseans.

### **Bledsoe County**

- Bledsoe County expended all but \$40.00 of their Litter Grant funds in 2021 as 51,847 pounds of litter were picked up from roadsides. 9.8%, or 5,099 pounds of this litter was recycled.

### **Clay County**

- All Litter Grant funds were expended in 2021, as 2,576 pounds of litter were collected from roadsides. 55.2%, or 1,421 pounds of litter was recycled. Clay County has an active litter prevention education program. They distribute seasonal Halloween goodie bags that displayed a litter prevention message. The Clay County Sanitation Dept. hosted a “Snowflakes are Falling” recycled ornament contest among local school-aged children. Also, litter magician Barry Mitchell dazzled elementary schools across Clay County with his special magic show.

### **Grundy County**

- 111,100 pounds of litter were removed from 1,323.9 miles of roadways in Grundy County. The county has worked closely with Keep Tennessee Beautiful to become the first state-level Keep America Beautiful affiliate in Tennessee.

### **Hancock County**

- 83,290 pounds of litter were removed from roadsides in Hancock County. This litter was picked up across 966.5 road miles.

### **Lake County**

- 41,595 pounds of litter were collected from 291 miles of roadsides in Lake County. Of that total, 97.9%, or 40,745 pounds were recycled.

### **Lauderdale County**

- Lauderdale County collected 140,895 pounds of litter from 9,447 miles of roadsides. Of that total 6,393 pounds, or 4.5%, was recycled. The county also cleaned up 20 illegal dump sites.

### **Perry County**

- 4,680 pounds of litter were collected from roadsides in Perry County. This total was collected from 19,440 miles of roadsides within the county.

### **Scott County**

- Scott County removed 51,700 pounds of litter from roadsides in 2021. The county also removed 13 illegal dump sites.

# Conclusion

Tennessee is a state abundant with scenic landscapes, and rugged natural beauty. Tennesseans are proud of their state, and disheartened by the presence of litter on roadsides, in waterways, and in their communities. The comprehensive litter prevention education and abatement offerings outlined in this report are award winning and nationally recognized as best practices. Each of the programs highlighted are ways in which TDOT partners with local governments, community groups, businesses, and non-profits in order to be good stewards, and bring about positive change, for our great state.

## ***All Tennesseans Can Prevent Litter.***

***Join Adopt-A-Highway:*** This all-free, all-volunteer program is a great way for individuals, families or large groups to give back. Adopt-A-Highway participants are expected to conduct a cleanup quarterly and receive all needed supplies and a free roadside recognition panel from TDOT.

***Use the Litter Hotline:*** If you see an act of littering, report it using the Litter Hotline. A convenient telephone hotline number and/or online form notifies litter bugs that their act was illegal, and greatly harms our state.

***Connect with Nobody Trashes Tennessee:*** Visit the campaign website, and like, follow and share social media content from TDOT's litter prevention campaign. Creative campaign materials are meant to raise litter awareness and connect Tennesseans to upcoming cleanup events.

***Cleanup Individually or Join A Nearby Event:*** The greatest impact one can have is through taking action, and picking up litter. Volunteer to pickup near your home, or with a group through a local cleanup organization.

TDOT's comprehensive litter prevention education and abatement programs works in all 95 counties in Tennessee. TDOT's Highway Beautification Office is continually working to improve its programs and forge new partnerships to make a more meaningful impact. Look for the 2023 Annual Report for updates and highlights of the new outreach developed to educate the public that littering is an important, but preventable, problem in Tennessee.

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