

# **Project Title: Litter Marshall Program – Clean Streets = Clean Water!**

## **Project Goals:**

The major goal of this project is to raise awareness that littering is not only a crime, but negatively impacts our precious waterways. A second goal is to try to use education as a way to reduce the number of floatables that enter local waterways. Through this program we attempt to address the problem of litter at the source.

## **Summary:**

This public awareness campaign to combat litter allows citizens to call our toll-free hotline (1-877-CPT- BILL) to report litter incidents from a moving vehicle. The callers provide the license number, make and model of the vehicle, the date, time and location of the incident. We then turn the reports over to the Bergen County Sheriff's office, which sends a warning letter to the vehicle owner advising that littering can carry a fine of up to \$500 and/or community service. In addition to the letter, offenders receive an informative brochure to educate about the effects of littering. The brochure conveys information that all litter can enter our storm drains and compromise water quality, and lists the length of time it takes for certain items to decompose. The brochure also contains tips for combating litter, such as keeping a bag in your car for trash, picking up after pets, etc. and contains facts about the problems that litter and floatables can cause. The personal information of the vehicle owner is kept strictly confidential; only the Sheriff's Department has access to the name and address of the vehicle owner.

## **Course of Action:**

Riverkeeper staff and a project volunteer held several meetings with the Sheriff's Department to discuss how the project would work, and discussed the need to advertise the project to make it successful. Once we had their commitment, we began seeking funding for billboards, as we felt that would reach the largest audience.

Thanks to the support of NEIWPCC /HEP and The Watershed Institute, the official launch of our Clean Streets = Clean Water campaign was held on November 10, 2009! Captain Bill Sheehan, Bergen County Sheriff Leo McGuire and staff from both offices held a press conference on Route 120, across from the Meadowlands Sports Complex. With a 14' x 48' billboard in the background touting the program, Capt. Bill and Sheriff McGuire outlined the way the program will work, and spoke about the collaborative arrangement between Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Sheriff's Department. "We both had the same passion to help keep the water clean" said Sheriff McGuire. "Most people don't realize that litter becomes water pollution once it rains" said Capt. Bill. "With every rain, stormwater washes litter and all manner of debris and waste off of our streets, down our storm drains and ultimately into our waterways."

Between November and December 2009, a total of two billboards (14'x48') and 4 posters (10.5' x 22.8') were erected at high-traffic areas in Bergen County. We received a discounted rate on the billboards due to our non-profit status. Thanks to this discount, we were able to pay to keep one of the posters up for an additional month. The remaining billboards/posters were scheduled to be in place for one month, but if there is no new customer for the location the billboards remain up longer (we know that the one on Route 120 is *still* in place as of July 22, 2010). Design for the brochures was finalized during this period, and 15,000 brochures were printed on recycled paper with FSC certification. Brochures have been distributed at all Riverkeeper events, and the Sheriff's office has stocked them at all Bergen County DMV offices.

Since we began the program we have received 71 calls reporting littering from vehicles. The most common report is cigarette butts, but we have also received reports of paper trash, coffee cups and bags being tossed. We forward the reports to the Sheriff's office approximately once a month. To date, neither Riverkeeper nor the Sheriff's Department has received any feedback from recipients of the warning letters.

In addition to the billboards, the program is on our website home page and has been reported in our quarterly newsletter, *Tidelines*. The Sheriff's office also has a text tip line that citizens can use to text reports. We ask callers how they learned about the program, so that we can track the success of our advertising methods. Most people have learned about the project via the billboards, our newsletter or the brochure.

We plan to make this a permanent program at Riverkeeper, and will continue to promote it at all events. While we do not have immediate plans to seek funding to launch another billboard campaign, we will sustain the program through our newsletter and event outreach.

### **Accomplishments:**

We are pleased to have accomplished the following during the course of this project:

- Developed a format for the program and an advertising campaign to promote the program.
- Created an informational brochure to be used as a handout and to accompany warning letters. During this period the Sheriff's office designed a warning letter to be sent to offenders.
- We conducted five meetings with the Sheriff's Department to monitor the progress of the project.
- Throughout the project period we monitored the calls received and passed them to the Sheriff's office.

One outcome of this project was a slightly increased engagement among our regular supporters. We received one donation specifically as a response to this project, and five of our regular supporters have asked for brochures to hand out.

There were several media articles (and a radio report) at the time of the project launch. Many people called us after seeing the articles or the billboards – and these calls tell us that people were thinking about the negative effects of littering. We know that many more citizens read the articles or saw the billboards – resulting in our message reaching a broad audience.

This program has been well received by the public, many people express how frustrated they are by litter and how pleased they are to have a way to address the problem. We believe that this program advances our position as a leading environmental organization in New Jersey because of the visibility of the program and our partnership with the Sheriff's Department. Many of the callers thank us for instituting this program; callers associate the program with our popular River Cleanup program and our other clean water initiatives. When this program was launched, it received print and radio coverage, benefitting both Riverkeeper and the Sheriff's Department. Our already good relationship with the Sheriff has been further cemented through this partnership, thanks to our mutual interest in reducing litter in Bergen County. This exposure and support is helping to brand Hackensack Riverkeeper as a leading clean water advocate, and the partnership with the Bergen County Sheriff showcases our ability to work with leading officials in creating, implementing and maintaining a successful program.

### **Evaluation:**

The number of callers to our hotline is a demonstration of the project's success. We are especially pleased that even though most of the billboards are no longer in place, people continue to call with reports. All calls are tracked via a spreadsheet, allowing us to see the reported information, how the caller learned of the program, and which items have been sent to the Sheriff's office. We have received 71 calls to our hotline as of July 22. 80% of the calls to our hotline result in a letter being sent. The remaining 20% are unable to be processed due to inaccurate or missing information. As of July 22, neither Riverkeeper nor the Sheriff's Department has received any feedback from letter recipients.

We have tracked the methods by which callers have learned about the program, here is the breakdown:

- Six callers learned about the program through the billboards.
- Seven callers learned about the program through the brochures.
- Eleven callers learned about the program through our newsletter.
- Four callers learned about the program through media coverage.
- Three people learned about the program through blast email sent when the program launched.
- Twenty two of the calls were from personal connections – either staff or volunteers associated with the program.
- One caller learned about the program at a meeting where Bill spoke.

For the remaining calls, we do not have any tracking as to how they learned about the program. For the first few weeks we were not asking callers how they learned about the program.

In looking at the above results, if we were starting over we would still execute the project with the same methods of outreach. We don't have a way of knowing how many people actually saw the billboards and media reports and were positively affected by them.

Both Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Sheriff's Department were pleased with media exposure surrounding this project. Press coverage of the project helped to reinforce our position in the eyes of the public as a leading environmental advocate.

We purchased 15,000 brochures. The Sheriff's Department has taken 7,000 for distribution at county offices, in the DMV offices and to send out with warning letters. Hackensack Riverkeeper has handed out approximately 2,900 brochures at events or provided to other groups for distribution.

We have been unable to determine a quantifiable system for estimating the reduction of trash from this program; however we believe the program has merit. The number of callers to our hotline has impressed us; clearly this program is valued by citizens. The majority of calls have been for cigarette butts, not the plastic bottles or other trash we normally find on our cleanups- allowing us to use this program to educate that cigarette butts ARE trash. We hope that this program raises awareness about the impact of littering, and that offenders realize that all garbage has a negative impact on the environment when not disposed of properly. For all offenders, we hope the program is a wake-up call – and that they realize that littering is a crime, and that other people will not stand by silently while you toss garbage out of your car. One goal of the program continues to be to change the mindset of people who litter – to make them more aware of the consequences (both legal and environmental) of their actions.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

One challenge that we have encountered with the program is that the Sheriff's office advises us that about 20% of the information we receive is inaccurate. For example, if we report "a silver Nissan

Sentra with license plate ABC123”, the plate and car descriptions do not match when the Sheriff’s office looks up the information. They may find that plate ABC123 is for a blue Ford Focus, for example. We may do another newsletter article to update our readers on the project, and if we do we will mention the need for accuracy. Our staff has also been alerted to the problem so that they can try to ensure they take down the information correctly.

On the positive side, this project has demonstrated that our partnership with the Sheriff’s office to pursue a common goal is extremely successful, and that this program could be used as a model in other areas. The Bergen County Sheriff, Leo McGuire, has been a long standing advocate against littering. As far back as when he was a patrolman, he would ticket people for tossing trash or cigarettes out of their car, saying “my town is not your ashtray”. The Sheriff and his staff shared concern about littering and its effect on our communities has been instrumental to the project’s success.

The success of this project was made possible thanks in large part to NEIWPC/HEP. We thank you for your support of our project, and your long-standing support of and belief in our work and programs.



L to R: Captain Bill Sheehan (the Hackensack Riverkeeper), Rosemary Dreger-Carey (volunteer), Lisa Ryan (Hackensack Riverkeeper staff), Diane Saccoccia (Hackensack Riverkeeper staff) and Bergen County Sheriff Leo McGuire



Billboard on Route 120



Captain Bill Sheehan and Sheriff Leo McGuire in front of the billboard on Route 120.



Billboard on Washington Avenue in Bergenfield

# You Can Help! Become a Litter Marshal!

- Keep a bag in your vehicle for garbage until you can dispose of it properly
- Place litter in trash receptacles
- Never throw litter in a street or storm drain
- Pick up litter on and around your property
- Always pick up after pets

**Keep a pen and paper handy in your car, and if you see somebody littering from a vehicle, write down the license plate, location, time, date and the item(s) tossed, and call the Bergen County Litter Marshal Hotline:  
**1-877-CPT-BILL****

**The vehicle's owner will be sent a letter of warning from the Sheriff.**



Capt. Bill Sheehan  
Hackensack Riverkeeper



Sheriff Leo McGuire  
Bergen County Sheriff

**“Together, we can  
kick litter  
to the curb!”**

**The CLEAN STREETS = CLEAN WATER Campaign and the Bergen County Litter Marshal Program is a Joint Project of Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Bergen County Sheriff's Office. Please call 1-877-CPT-BILL for more information.**



[www.hackensackriverkeeper.org](http://www.hackensackriverkeeper.org)

[www.bcsd.us/](http://www.bcsd.us/)

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*Green Printing/  
FSC Certification  
Blurb*

# “Clean Streets = Clean Water”

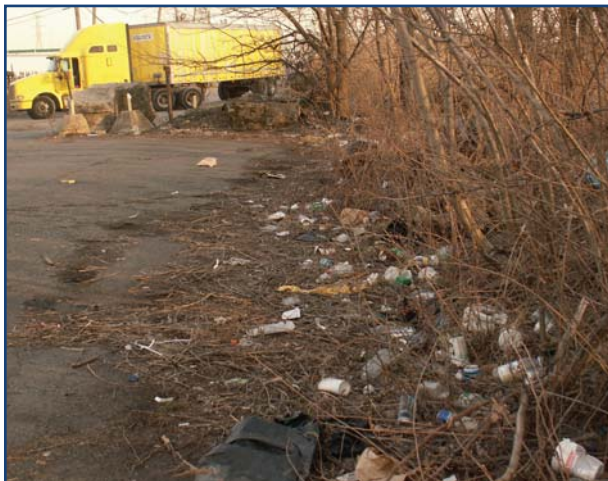
## The Bergen County Litter Marshal Program



**Candy wrapper here,  
Cigarette butt there...**

# WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

# LITTER IS A BIG DEAL!



**Because when it rains, all that litter washes off the land, into storm drains, and straight to the lowest point - THE RIVER! (source of your drinking water)**



## Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Bergen County Sheriff have joined forces to prevent litter in our streets, towns and waterways. Can we count you in?

### The Facts About Litter:

#### ■ What is litter?

Litter is solid waste that contaminates our roads, parks, waterways, school yards and local communities. It takes many forms:

Cigarette butts	Paper
Plastic bottles	Metal cans
Glass bottles	Food wrappers
Styrofoam	Tires
Pet waste	Plastic bags

#### ■ Where does litter come from?

There are many sources of litter: pedestrians, motorists, overflowing household garbage, loading docks, marinas and construction sites with inadequate waste receptacles and improperly covered or uncovered trucks.

#### ■ How long does litter stick around?

Glass bottle . . . . .	1 million years
Fishing line . . . . .	600 years
Plastic bottles . . . . .	450 years
Disposable diapers . . . . .	450 years
Aluminum can . . . . .	80-200 years
Rubber boot sole . . . . .	50-80 years
Foam cup . . . . .	50 years
Tin can . . . . .	50 years
Leather . . . . .	50 years
Nylon fabric . . . . .	30-40 years
Plastic film canister . . . . .	20-30 years
Plastic bag . . . . .	10-20 years
Cigarette filter . . . . .	1-5 years
Wool sock . . . . .	1-5 years
Plywood . . . . .	1-3 years
Waxed milk carton . . . . .	3 months
Apple core . . . . .	2 months
Newspaper . . . . .	6 weeks
Orange or banana peel . . . . .	2-5 weeks
Paper towel . . . . .	2-4 weeks

#### ■ Litter is unhealthy.

Litter is often blown by the wind or washed into storm drains by the rain. Much of it ends up in our waterways, clogging storm drains, causing floods and compromising our water quality. Litter can also cause disease, start fires and lead to serious accidents.

#### ■ Litter is expensive.

It takes huge sums of money to clean up our highways, parks, school grounds and lake fronts - money that could be spent on schools, parks, community projects, helping business and creating jobs.

#### ■ Litter is unsightly.

Not only does litter look bad, it creates a negative impression on visitors, discourages tourism and even makes neighborhoods less safe for children and adults.

#### ■ Litter is a crime.

There are numerous laws in Bergen County that prohibit litter on public and private property. Violation of those laws can result in a civil fine up to \$500 and/or community service. Avoiding these penalties is easy: don't litter! Better yet, get some friends together and clean up some of that litter!

