

# *2019 Texas Litter Survey*

## **Executive Summary**

Environmental Resources Planning, LLC (ERP), in cooperation with GDC Marketing and Ideation (GDC) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), conducted a Visible Litter Survey (VLS) to estimate the number, types and brand names of littered items found along Texas roadways in 2019. The results of this survey were compared to those from the 2013 VLS, which was also conducted by ERP.

In 2013, TxDOT had requested that ERP conduct two separate litter surveys and report on the changes in litter found between the two surveys. For 2019, TxDOT requested that ERP conduct a single litter survey and compare the results to the original survey conducted in 2013.

In each of these surveys, litter was tallied on 253 sites across Texas, each consisting of a one-tenth mile stretch of TxDOT-maintained roadway. This Executive Summary offers an overview of findings from the 2019 VLS. The full report provides a complete analysis of the data.

## **Study Highlights**

Highlights from the 2019 VLS are shown below. Comprehensive data can be found in the full report and appendices.

- Visible Litter along TxDOT-maintained roadways decreased overall by 17% between 2013 and 2019.
- When Tire Debris is excluded, Visible Litter decreased by 28%.
- Tire Debris was the largest component of Visible Litter (29%) and was pervasive across all areas of Texas. It was most prevalent along interstates. Of the 32 sites that had more than 1,000 pieces of Tire Debris, 29 of them (91%) were Interstates.
- The decrease in Visible Litter occurred despite estimated rises in both adult population in Texas (10.3%) and traffic levels statewide (12.7%).
- Items discarded from cars and trucks account for 51% of all litter along TxDOT-maintained roadways, while Vehicle Debris, which includes blown tires, car accidents and DIY car maintenance, accounts for another 35%.
- Micro Litter found during the 2019 survey increased by 90%. This may be due, in part, to the fact that smaller items are more difficult to clean up than larger items.

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- Cigarette Butts continued to comprise the largest portion of Micro Litter in 2019 (24%), compared to 28% from the initial survey conducted in 2013. Although the percentage dropped, the actual number of littered Cigarette Butts increased 63%
- Statistical tests show that sites near proximity indicators (e.g. beautified areas, traffic signals and signs, etc.) generally have lower levels of Vehicle Debris.
- The number of littered Beverage Containers (especially beer cans, water bottles and soda cans, etc.) tallied in 2019 was 31% lower than in 2013.
- Recyclables (Beverage Containers and Paper) comprised 25% of Visible Litter.
- Given the decrease in Visible Litter despite increases in both population and annual vehicle miles traveled, the *Don't mess with Texas* program is likely more effective than is realized.