

ACTION ON LITTER PRESS CONFERENCE
APRIL 2, 2024 11 A.M. QUEEN'S PARK MEDIA STUDIO
REMARKS FROM SHEILA WHITE AND PAT BARRETT

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY](#)

[Link to CBC Radio Canada story](#) by Etienne Lajoie

Sheila: <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2061928/dechet-ordure-reduction-canada?>

Good morning. I'm Sheila White. I'm a veteran warrior in the field of litter. In 2012 I founded the website litterpreventionprogram.com as a public service. It is the world's most comprehensive compendium of information on litter and littering, including 450 weekly newsletters, a niche publication with a global subscriber base. I created a TDSB-approved, live presentation for elementary students of sing-along, litter-themed action songs, and a game, *Blue Box or Not?*

When the Day of Action on Litter was established by the Government of Ontario in 2019, I was optimistic, especially after environment ministry staff invited my colleague and me to a series of four consultations on how to make the most of the opportunity a dedicated Day of Action on Litter represented.

Pat Barrett, now retired, spent 22 years with the City of Toronto doing strategic communications for such environmental programmes as recycling, reuse, reducing waste, composting, including a particular focus on litter reduction.

She championed the public education, website promotion, advertising and marketing for Toronto's annual Community Cleanup Days and the 20-Minute Makeover since its inception in 2004.

This programme also involved several GTA municipalities because, as we know, litter doesn't respect boundaries. Pat coordinated the participation of City staff and residents, Toronto school boards and GTA communities.

She secured valued event sponsorship from the businesses whose products most often end up as litter due to consumers' reckless behavior. So, to start, I'm going to turn things over to litter and solid waste communications expert, Pat Barrett.

Pat:

As important and beneficial as these cleanup campaigns are, the fight against litter is a daily battle. It requires a commitment from all of us to do the right thing - put litter in its place - every day.

Pride of place is ours to enjoy, and achievable with the right attitude. Whether we live here, work here, visit here, we're all in it together. Each of us are in control. Our individual actions speak for themselves and collectively make a difference.

So, what's the operative word here? ACTION!

How ironic that the Ontario Government established a Provincial Day of Action on Litter, scheduled annually for the second Tuesday in May, but it takes no action! No effort to promote it to the media, to citizens, to its very own politicians, to businesses, corporations or the municipalities across the province.

The Act on Litter website is static. It's rarely updated (last one was Oct. 2023) and to this day, less than six weeks prior to the event day, doesn't even state the date of May 14!

The site, while falling flat in so many ways, asks viewers to take action. But to see the site, you have to find the site. Good luck with that!

Better to put the subject upfront, so it is seen and easily accessible. Currently, they rely on people typing the word "litter" into the search engine to find what little information there is.

Buried in the depths of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks web site, there is no link re litter from the main page to get you there. From the Environment and Energy home page, you need to click on "Waste Management" - how many would make that connection to find Litter messaging? - to arrive at a link list and guess that clicking on #11 called "Related" might be the way to go. Act on Litter is the last link way at the bottom on a page that hasn't been updated since August 2023.

Overall, the page content focuses on waste management, not on fighting litter. It speaks more about how to reduce waste, reuse, dispose of garbage, organics and recyclables properly.

It's the same for the visuals, - they don't focus on littering. In fact, these pictures, until we urged the government to do so, did not reflect any cultural diversity.

If you look closely, you may see mention of organizing a litter cleanup and option to download a cleanup guide and a cleanup reporting form to declare what you picked up.

At our prompting, the site finally included links to reporting littering and illegal dumping.

How well used are these resources? Currently, we have no way of knowing. Couldn't this site let us know? Provide some metrics re the abundance of organized litter pickups, their success rating re tonnage of litter waste diverted and recyclables rescued from landfill, photos to illustrate participation, a list of unique items found.

Doing all this would make the site come alive, create interest, increase viewership, entice involvement and prove litter cleanups are a worthwhile investment.

Allowing enough time to create awareness is vital. Promotion needs to start well in advance of the event: Several months prior at least. That's assuming all the logistics are already in place.

Provide resources to your politicians so they can spread the word through their communication materials and perhaps they'll take on a leadership role in their own riding re organizing a litter pickup. Anti-littering messaging can be done on a continual basis, especially following a spring snow melt that only too quickly reveals old litter.

Let's not forget about how crucial it is to showcase why people litter in the first place. None of this site's content provides this information.

Studies are available that reveal the psychology of littering along with tactics to stop littering. These resource links aren't there, but they could be, and should be.

Just as the Ontario government's web site tells us "Your actions matter," we declare the same to the province. Unfortunately, Day of Action is only a bunch of words on a page few will ever find. There's nothing behind it. No energy, no support, no marketing, no metrics.

We encourage you to do better. If you truly care about preventing litter, you have no choice but to take action.

Sheila: We need to see action from this government on their Ontario Day of Action on Litter. No problem ever gets solved by keeping quiet about it. After five years, hardly anyone knows about this day. You'll see it's a question on the Test Your Litter IQ quiz that we made available today, and can be found at litterpreventionprogram.com. When is the Ontario Day of Action on Litter? I ask this of people all the time. After five years, nobody knows. Not even the two fellows I spoke to at my local transfer station when I went to recycle some batteries last week, or the Toronto employee who phoned me recently for statistics on single-use plastic litter.

This is the first year my MPP has mentioned the Day of Action on Litter in his newsletter. I had to push for nearly two years to get that to happen. (show newsletter). Why hasn't every Member of Provincial Parliament received details about this by now? And, as Pat indicates, this whole campaign is pretty sketchy. The material should focus on changing littering behaviours to stop people from throwing down, not just on volunteer cleanups.

There are a lot of reasons to care about litter. Briefly, I'll list them: Litter --

- causes environmental harm; wildlife deaths
- adds to the plastic pollution crisis – 80% of litter in waterways originates on land
- denigrates and devalues areas of the city
- clogs drains, causes flooding, higher home insurance premiums
- creates an appearance of neglect, which attracts unwelcome activity/crime
- begets more littering
- is a drag on the public purse
- has a negative psychological impact

All these reasons to care, but there's a key point I'd like people to know.

When waste is placed in the proper bin, the corporations who produce the waste are required by provincial law to pay for it to be managed. When waste lands in the right bin, in legal terms, it's called "end-of-life waste." Those words are defined in the legislation governing waste management.

When waste goes anywhere other than the bin, it is litter, and taxpayers alone bear the high cost. Producers don't have to pay anything. Cleanup costs are dumped on municipalities and volunteers.

I give the government credit for saying that attention to litter is a priority. We agree.

To put action behind those words at the top of the Provincial Day of Action on Litter Act, 2019, which say: "Reducing litter is a priority in Ontario," here's what Doug Ford's government can easily and readily do:

- invest dollars in advertising to promote good, non-littering behaviours, e.g. the iconic "Don't Mess With Texas" in its 35th year. We know the Government of Ontario has money for advertising with the report that \$8 million was splurged on a recent round of feel-good ads.
- assign a person in charge

Understand that at the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Parks and Conservation, employees working on the Day of Action on Litter wear many other hats. This file needs a specialist - someone with authority to highlight "litter" on the environment ministry home page, revamp web pages and messaging. (Ministry staff told us changing the home page to add the word "litter" needed cabinet approval! Is there a joke here? "How many cabinet members does it take to change a word?" Answer: "We don't know, but we've been asking for three years.")
- arrange for advertising space on those gigantic illuminated billboards that the government introduced on major highways (clout, bulk buy, contra deals)
- update signage
- strike a special legislative committee on litter welcoming all parties and public submissions
- use existing publications to promote proper litter disposal
- engage cross ministerial teams, OPS in an Abatement Strategy (MNR, MECP, MTO, Health, Ec. Dev)
- hold a Litter Summit
- involve producers and industry groups in litter prevention and funding solutions, tobacco, beverage, confectionery, plastics and packaging, coffee, restaurants, grocery, construction, contracted waste haulers, agencies like CAA, motor vehicle association, RPRA, green groups, BIAs, community groups
- have a funding mechanism
- provide grants for litter education tools
- provide small grants to equip groups for the job of litter picking or get producers on board to foot the bill (mention benefits of the task, *People Against Littering: P.A.L.'s Brampton Mission here*)
- develop a roadside litter strategy for highways, including the two in Toronto it has just assumed. (*Characterize Highway 413 as a route to more littering*)

- initiate Ontario-wide contests (slogans, art, jingles), awards, clean competitions such as in Tidy Towns, Keep America Beautiful umbrella model
- weave a strong message about waste handling and littering into Licensing, Citizenship, Events, Pamphlets, MPP messaging
- have a dedicated Officer responsible for steering the provincial commitment to make littering a priority in the Province of Ontario

In conclusion, the extent of Ontario's problem with littering is massive. The Ford government's response is meek.

We're here not only to publicize the upcoming Day of Action on Litter on Tuesday, May 14 because the government isn't getting that message out, but we're also here to stimulate action.

The reliance on volunteers to clean up does not cost the government any money, and that strategy doesn't get at the root of the littering problem.

The challenge is to persuade a significant chunk of people who litter not to do it.

The prevention and education piece costs money. Pat and I have yet to see any evidence that the Ford government is prepared to go that route, which unfortunately contradicts its claim of wanting action on litter.

We brought a "Please Care" T-shirt for Premier Ford today, to remind him we have our eye on him. You'll see we also brought with us Please Care Do Not Litter brochures and a sign, the litter quiz I mentioned earlier, and personal, portable, extinguishing ashtrays, once manufactured by the Ford family printing company.

Dropping cigarette butts is the most prolific form of littering. This year, Rothmans, Benson and Hedges Inc. marked the 5th anniversary of Unsmoke Canada, which funds cigarette butt beach cleanups. But who's telling smokers not to throw down in the first place? This is just one of the issues an action plan on litter should address.

Thank you.

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Contact:
Sheila White, Principal
Litter Prevention Program
416-321-0633
www.litterpreventionprogram.com

* QUIZ *		
Would you do this?	YES	NO
1. Toss materials out car windows		
2. Hold the door for someone		
3. Fail to clear your table at a fast food restaurant or workplace lunchroom		
4. Walk 10 or more steps to put trash in a bin		
5. Give the remaining time on your parking chit to someone who can use it		
6. Fail to pick up after your dog's fouling		
7. Pocket change when given wrong amount		
8. Leave your takeout coffee or beverage cup wherever you happen to be at the time		
9. Eat or drink at the wheel		
10. Overflow your outdoor garbage bins		
11. Leave newspaper on a transit car		
12. Put your feet up on the train seat		
13. Party at the beach and leave a mess		
14. Stick chewed gum to hard surfaces		
15. Cycle on a sidewalk		
16. Avoid waste fees by dumping		
17. Text/use cell phone while driving		
18. Throw down cigarette butts		
19. Spit in public places		
20. Drop litter in the street		
21. Do you know when the annual Ontario Day of Action on Litter occurs ?		
www.litterpreventionprogram.com		

TEST YOUR LITTER IQ AND WHAT OUR QUIZ SAYS ABOUT YOU!

Did you know?

When waste is placed in the proper bin, the corporations who produce that waste are required by provincial law to pay for it to be managed. When waste lands in the right bin, in legal terms, it's called "end-of-life waste."

When waste goes anywhere other than the bin, it's litter, and taxpayers alone bear the high cost. Producers don't have to pay anything.

It's better to bin it!

SCORING:

For "YES" answers, for 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17; score 0 POINTS

For "YES" answers, for 3, 10; score 1 POINT

For "YES" answers, for 8, 19; score 3 POINTS

For "YES" answers, for 1, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20; score 7 POINTS

TOTAL: 0-2: Low litter risk
3-6: Caution!
7-12: Litterer, be mindful
13-20: Litterer in urgent need of reform
21+: Warning - anti-social tendencies

A. 21. Ontario Day of Action Against Litter is the second Tuesday of every May and falls on May 14 in 2024.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Clean Up Act On Litter, experts tell Premier

TORONTO (April 2, 2024) The Ontario Day of Action on Litter lacks action, and that needs to change, say two litter prevention experts who were invited by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) staff to assess the program in 2020.

Established by Conservative government legislation in 2019, the Day of Action on Litter campaign is “the Ford government’s best kept secret,” said Sheila White, of www.litterpreventionprogram.com.

“There’s nothing behind it. No energy, no support, no marketing, no metrics,” said Pat Barrett, a retired City of Toronto litter reduction and solid waste communications expert.

White and Barrett met quarterly in 2020 with ministry officials to discuss and evaluate the program.

“We want real action on litter, and we’re not seeing it,” said White at their press conference held today at Queen’s Park with support from well-known environmentalist Mary-Margaret McMahon, the MPP for Beaches-East York.

Barrett and White, who between them have more than 50 years of experience in litter-related issues, described their ideas and concerns about the five-year-old Day of Action on Litter. They see littering as a concerning and costly, province-wide social problem that demands better from a government that claims in its bill that “reducing litter is a priority in Ontario.”

“Allowing enough time to create awareness is vital. Promotion needs to start well in advance of the event,” said Barrett. “The MECP ‘Act of Litter’ webpage content and visuals focus on waste management, not on fighting litter.” www.ontario.ca/page/act-on-litter

“The extent of Ontario’s problem with littering is massive,” said White. “The Ford government’s response is meek. We’re here not only to publicize the upcoming Day of Action on Litter on Tuesday, May 14 because the government isn’t getting the message out. We’re also here to stimulate action. We need concerted education and prevention tactics.”

Among their common-sense slate of 18 doable actions for Premier Doug Ford and MPP Andrea Khanjin, the minister responsible for the environment:

- advertise the Day of Action on Litter properly and budget for it;
- have a dedicated, permanent Officer with authority to steer the government’s commitment to make littering a priority in the province;
- strike a special legislative committee on litter, welcoming all parties and public submissions on solving Ontario’s unacceptably high rate of littering;
- hold a Premier’s Litter Summit involving producers and industry groups in litter prevention and funding solutions for municipalities - tobacco, beverage, restaurant chains, plastics and packaging, snack and confectionery, the construction industry, for example;
- communicate to the public the importance of binning waste so that corporate producers pay.