

Briefing: Preventing and reducing litter in Scotland

PRGS offer on litter

PRGS is a group of 34 Scottish and international companies and organisations who came together in 2013 to help the Scottish government achieve its objectives to increase the amount and quality of recycling and to prevent and clean up litter.

Scotland is playing a leading role. It has a litter strategy, a Minister who has placed litter high on the agenda and an excellent campaign body in Keep Scotland Beautiful which has an incredible reach.

PRGS members have significant experience worldwide of working on anti-litter initiatives. Currently some members are supporting an initiative called [Neat Streets](#) which identifies novel ways to make it fun **not** to litter and to persuade people to want **not** to litter.

PRGS has offered the government a Packaging Resource Commitment Scotland. This is a commitment to work in partnership with the government, local authorities, COSLA, Keep Scotland Beautiful, ZWS and others to build on existing systems to achieve the government's objectives.

By harnessing our marketing and communications skills – not just with customers and suppliers but also with our staff – PRGS will help make the [Clean Up Scotland](#) campaign even more effective.

Background

PRGS members want to fight litter because it's a bad advertisement for a brand to have its name in the gutter. Products and their packaging do not litter themselves but we all want a clean, safe environment and PRGS wants to work with others to achieve it.

Research into littering and experience from anti-litter campaigns shows that there is no point targeting or cleaning up just some types of litter.

Litter breeds litter so all of it needs to be cleared up. Even if till receipts, packaging, gum, newspapers or banana skins were removed, other littered items would remain and attract more. Just one item of litter makes a place look uncared for and people are then inclined to add to it.

- The solution is for **all** stakeholders to pool resources and tackle **all** litter. The cure for litter is a comprehensive approach that includes educating people, provision of infrastructure, effective cleaning and law enforcement. Everyone wants a clean environment. The solution is in our hands; let's bin all rubbish. PRGS is ready to help.

Suggested "solutions" that don't work

- **Deposits:** Putting levies or deposits on selected items that are sometimes littered may influence what happens to those specific items but it does not have any effect on other litter because it can only target part of the problem and it does nothing to change attitudes and behaviour. In fact it can exacerbate litter.

There is no evidence that deposits have ever been an appropriate way to tackle littering. For example in 2011 the Swedish government, despite having had deposits on drinks containers for 20+ years, increased on-the-spot fines for littering drinks containers because litter is still a

problem. Levies are also costly to administer. For example, Germany has a deposits system on drinks containers which costs over £4million a year in administration costs – all wasted money.

Deposits are not appropriate in a country like Scotland that has invested heavily in a nationwide kerbside recycling system. Councils would lose income from the containers that would instead be diverted to a duplicate recovery route.

In 2015 major UK food retailers surveyed over 2000 customers about deposits. They found:

- 86% of customers believe a deposit scheme will discriminate against those who cannot easily return containers, including the elderly and disabled
- More than 90% believe it will not increase the amount of recycling that they do and returning some containers to a shop would be less convenient than local authorities' household collections
- 78% dislike or strongly dislike the idea of having to pay more up-front for drinks in bottles, cartons and cans.

- **Recycling:** Using recyclable products or installing more recycling systems to treat waste as a resource does not address litter or littering. Someone who recycles looks for the right bin or at least uses a bin; in contrast someone who litters can't be bothered to find any bin let alone a recycling bin. Litterers and recyclers are at exactly opposite ends of a behavioural spectrum. The two behaviours are completely separate.
- **Biodegradable materials:** Requiring potentially littered items to be biodegradable makes no difference to litter. Banana skins are biodegradable, glass is inert - as litter both are objectionable and neither degrade within an acceptable amount of time. None of us will leave a banana skin on our doorstep for weeks in the hope it will disappear.

Who we are:

PRGS [members](#) include A.G Barr, Scottish Grocers Federation, the Scottish Food and Drink Federation, Tennent Caledonian, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Scotch Whisky Association, and Scottish Wholesale Association.



For more information contact: PRGS Chair, Jane Bickerstaffe 07788 724817 - email PRGS@pagodapr.com or www.prgs.org.uk

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