

Litter Action Plan

National Anti-Litter Forum

Litter pollution is a major threat to the quality of Ireland's environment. It is a very visible and objectionable affront to the kind of environment people want to see and to live in.

This Litter Action Plan details the measures being taken by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Mr. Noel Dempsey T.D., and Minister of State, Mr. Dan Wallace T.D., who has special responsibility in this area, on foot of the report of the National Anti-Litter Forum. The Forum report, entitled *Taking Pride in our Environment*, was presented to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government by the Forum on 28 July 2000; the report is now being published and made widely available.

Action Plan

The Litter Action Plan represents further widening and deepening of the anti-litter programme pursued by Ministers since 1997 and detailed at the end of this Action Plan.

Ministers endorse the view of the Forum that the litter problem will only be solved through a partnership approach in which all sectors and individuals play their part. This need for partnership is underscored by the evidence, provided in *Attitudes and Actions: A National Survey on the Environment* published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government in April 2000, that stated concern about the litter problem is not translating into responsible behaviour: nearly half of the people interviewed admitted to having littered.

Accordingly, in addition to detailing the measures being taken by Ministers in relation to litter prevention and control in the period ahead, the Action Plan also sets out areas where they are looking to others to join them in taking action.

Details of the Action Plan are set out in the following sections. For convenience, the Action Plan uses the same headings as are used in the Forum report: enforcing the law, cleaning up, promoting education and awareness, and using economic instruments; actions cutting across a number of these areas are detailed first.

Cross Cutting Action

- Ministers will take every opportunity to encourage local authorities to improve their performance in the prevention and control of litter (including by devoting greater resources to this area where necessary). Local authorities are, and will remain, the principal public bodies with responsibility for tackling litter pollution. Some authorities

have stepped-up their performance in recent years: other authorities must now intensify their anti-litter action so that overall performance improves.

- The Forum report is being sent to each local authority city and county manager and being made available to elected members of local authorities. Local authorities will be asked to report to the Forum on their progress in implementing relevant recommendations.
- The elected members of local authorities are being encouraged to play their full part in galvanising local authority anti-litter action. This should include ensuring that each local authority:
 - has a Litter Management Plan, in accordance with the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 which elected members are satisfied meets the anti-litter needs of their area,
 - prepares and considers an annual progress report on the operation of the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 in accordance with the requirements of the Act,
 - allocates the level of resources necessary for - and takes - rigorous enforcement action and other effective measures to prevent and control litter,
 - engages in constructive and creative partnerships with local business/commercial interests, Tidy Towns Committees, residents, community and other groups, and schools to tackle the litter problem in their area.
- A number of local authorities are undertaking new and innovative forms of anti-litter action (e.g. by "naming and shaming" litter offenders, organising anti-litter challenges between towns and villages on a countywide basis). Other local authorities are now being invited to implement similar initiatives in their own areas.
- To assist in wider take-up of these initiatives, information on best practice in relation to anti-litter measures will be disseminated to local authorities as part of the National Litter Pollution Monitoring System.
- Local authorities will be able to improve their litter management plans by availing of best practice guidance on plan content – *An Assessment of Local Authority Litter Management Plans* - which has been made available to authorities as part of the National Litter Pollution Monitoring System.

- If a local authority fails to comply with its statutory duty under litter legislation, it will be open to Ministers to withhold grants from it under powers to become available under the Local Government Bill, 2000.
- Consistent with the emphasis in the Forum report on the public sector leading anti-litter action by example, public authorities will be asked to develop litter action plans for their own organisations.
- Since 1997, the Ministers have increased significantly the level of resources for litter abatement. It is the Ministers' intention to maintain and further increase funding for anti-litter measures in the years ahead – the Exchequer anti-litter provision for 2001 is £950,000, an increase of 19% on the 2000 figure.
- A significant percentage of the revenue from the planned levies on plastic bags and landfill operations will be used for strengthened anti-litter measures.
- A key part of the future work of the Forum will be to fully engage the business sector in assisting to fund anti-litter measures.
- The Forum will work to promote and facilitate local anti-litter partnerships which will involve action in areas such as education/awareness and clean up.
- Community and voluntary groups will be encouraged to participate actively in anti-litter action. Participation in clean-ups has increased in recent years but there is considerable scope for increased participation at local level: the *Attitudes and Actions* survey shows that up to three-quarters of people have never helped local groups to clear litter/waste.

Enforcing the Law

- Ministers agree with the Forum on the importance of rigorous enforcement of the litter laws. There have been improvements in local authority litter enforcement action; between 1997 and 1999:
 - the number of litter wardens employed more than trebled,
 - the number of prosecutions increased more than fourfold,
 - the number of on-the-spot fines levied increased from less than 1000 to over 16,500.

- There is, however, a need for further intensification of the local authority enforcement effort. In particular, there is a need for improvements in performance to be extended to all local authority areas - too many local authorities still do not employ litter wardens or show little direct evidence of enforcement action through prosecutions taken and on-the-spot fines issued. Ministers will actively encourage local authorities to achieve more consistently high levels of performance, especially in relation to numbers of litter wardens, prosecutions and on-the-spot fines.
- Local authorities will be expected to publish indicators of their litter enforcement performance and to set challenging targets for this service. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will also publicise comparative litter enforcement data for local authorities.
- Discussions will take place with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on how the Gardai and the courts system can better support the local authority litter enforcement effort.
- In addition to the primary enforcement role of litter wardens, supported by the Gardai, enforcement of the litter laws will now also form part of the duties of the Community Warden Service, which will be piloted in 5 local authorities over a three-year period, commencing early in 2001.
- Following a review in the Department of the Environment and Local Government and consultation with local authorities as part of the work of the Forum, proposals for strengthening the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 have been approved by Government and are being brought forward in the context of the Environmental Protection Agency (Amendment) Bill on which drafting will start shortly. These amendments will enable local authorities more effectively to enforce the litter laws and will also provide for increased financial penalties.
- Key changes proposed include:
 - abolishing advertising by means of placing items on vehicles,
 - requiring that articles or advertisements exhibited in a public place include the name and address of the person on whose behalf they are being exhibited,
 - giving local authorities wider powers to make anti-litter bye-laws for their functional areas. At present, local authorities can only make bye-laws to regulate the distribution of advertising material,

- removing the restriction to built-up areas of the requirement to keep free from litter areas adjoining public roads, so as to give effect to this provision in rural as well as urban areas.
- Ministers are also proposing to increase the fines for offences under the litter laws:
 - the current fine for summary offences (up to £1500) is at the maximum for minor offences. To increase the fine, it is necessary to provide for conviction on indictment for litter offences. The new Bill will propose a maximum fine on conviction of up to £100,000,
 - for continuing offences, the proposed maximum fines will be £400 per day (for summary offences – up from £100 at present) and £1000 per day (for indictable offences),
 - progressively increasing the on-the-spot fine to £100.
- These new financial penalties will clearly signal that society is not prepared to tolerate litter pollution.
- Local authorities are being invited to take forward the Forum recommendations in relation to provision of free-phone services to report offences.
- Litter wardens are to the fore in the battle against litter. There is a need for greater training and guidance for wardens in the carrying out of their duties. The Local Government Management Services Board is being asked to consider the needs in this area and recommend how best they can be met.
- There is a need for greater flexibility in the working arrangements of litter wardens so that, for example, they can better cover late night events, weekends, etc. Consistent with the *Better Local Government* modernisation programme with its emphasis on improvements in customer service, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* recognises that nowadays the needs and demands placed on local authorities require additional flexibility in service provision. On this basis, local authorities are being invited to make appropriate local arrangements for greater flexibility in respect of the litter warden service.

Cleaning Up

- Considerable work has been undertaken since 1999 on the development of a National Litter Pollution Monitoring System. Local authorities are now expected to proceed with full implementation of the system, which will be a key tool to measure, and assist in the improvement of, local authority anti-litter performance.
- National Spring Clean, which received increased funding in 2000, will continue to be supported by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and it will be subject to evaluation by the Forum to ensure maximum effectiveness.
- Local authorities are being asked to review their existing clean-up activities to ensure that they are achieving maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
- Regulations will be made early in 2001 providing for the licensing by local authorities of commercial waste collectors and the imposition of appropriate environmental controls in relation to such activities.
- Grant assistance will be made available in respect of the capital cost of the development of a network of civic amenity sites where the public may safely deposit large recyclable items (such as electrical appliances) as well as certain hazardous materials, for the purpose of recovery or environmentally sound disposal.
- Legal and voluntary measures will be introduced to ensure reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste and proper waste management practices on construction sites.
- The destruction and abandonment of end-of-life vehicles (ELVs) is anti-social behaviour which must be tackled vigorously. Measures will be advanced to establish an effective and accessible recovery system for ELVs which may be utilised by members of the public. In the event of failure to reach a voluntary agreement, a mandatory scheme with proper legislative support will be introduced.
- The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will make a regulation under the Waste Management Act, 1996 requiring the owners of supermarkets, service stations and other sales outlets to provide in a prominent place at such outlets receptacles for the deposit of packaging - a potential litter pollutant - by their customers.

Promoting Education and Awareness

- Ministers endorse the views of the Forum on the importance of litter education and awareness and of changing the attitude of people, including young people, who cause or tolerate litter.
- The anti-litter message will form an important part of the National Environmental Awareness Campaign in the period ahead.
- In view of the littering potential of its products, the National Lottery is being asked to determine how it can contribute to the anti-litter effort, including through its advertising campaigns.
- Increased funding was made available to local authorities in 2000 for anti-litter education and awareness activities – £400,000 was provided by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, compared to £350,000 in 1999, an increase of over 14%.
- Grants to local authorities from the Department of the Environment and Local Government for anti-litter education and awareness activities will be used to help leverage local business funding of suitable additional anti-litter measures.
- Support will be given by the Departments of Education and Science, and Environment and Local Government, for a renewed effort by schools, colleges and training centres to promote litter awareness and education among the school-going and student population. Actions will focus particularly on opportunities for the promotion of litter education and awareness and the development of anti-litter projects in the teaching of relevant subjects on the school curriculum at primary and second level and in Youthreach Centres. Measures will also be developed aimed at engaging the co-operation of parents through the National Parents Councils (Primary and Post-Primary), and of National Youth Organisations, in litter education/awareness.
- An Taisce, in consultation with the Departments of Education and Science, and Environment and Local Government, is examining measures to increase participation by schools in the Green Schools Initiative, which has a particular focus on litter prevention and waste recycling. The aim is to involve all schools in the Initiative.
- Local authority litter education/awareness activities will have a particular focus on involving schools in anti-litter action.

- Public authorities are being asked to consider how litter prevention and control can be more fully integrated into grant and tax incentive schemes operated by those authorities. The Minister for the Environment and Local Government will consult with his colleagues in Government on the scope for amending relevant schemes in this way.
- The Tidy Towns movement has proven itself to be effective as a 'carrier' of environmental values, particularly in relation to the litter problem. The aim now is to build on this success: Tidy Towns Committees will be encouraged to play an enhanced role through involvement in partnership initiatives with local authorities and other groups to tackle litter at local level.
- The Department of the Environment and Local Government, in partnership with local authorities, regional tourism organisations, the various sponsors (including the national sponsor, SuperValu) and the committees themselves, will intensify promotion of the Tidy Towns competition; particular efforts will be made to extend its influence and attract participation from communities in the five cities, not least with a view to replicating the competition's success in combating litter.
- An inventory of successful litter education and awareness activities, particularly at local level, will be developed and made available through a web-site.

Using Economic Instruments

- Waste minimisation, recovery and recycling will ensure better use of natural resources and reduce the littering potential of waste. A policy statement to advance these approaches to waste management is being finalised by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government.
- Waste reduction will continue to be a key theme in the National Environmental Awareness Campaign.
- Discarded plastic bags are a very visible form of litter pollution. Last June, the Government approved the proposal of the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to introduce a levy on plastic shopping bags, which will result in a minimum charge of 10 pence per bag. Detailed proposals to implement the levy are currently being developed and will be announced shortly.
- The Forum report proposes that a number of sectors particularly associated with litter polluting products (chewing gum, take-away foods, drinks containers) should be given an

opportunity to propose voluntary initiatives to prevent and control litter from these sources. Ministers are now inviting the relevant sectors to take this opportunity to produce clear commitments to anti-litter action in relation to the products concerned.

- Local authorities will be encouraged to use to the full their powers under the Waste Management Act, 1996 to ensure that waste, especially commercial waste in urban areas, is properly presented for collection and does not cause nuisance or litter. The views of the Forum on this will be further pursued.
- Local authorities will be required to step up their enforcement of the Waste Management (Packaging) Regulations, 1997 so as to ensure that “self complying” major producers (i.e. who are not members of REPAK) fulfil their obligations under the regulations.

Monitoring and Review

A major programme of anti-litter initiatives has been pursued since 1997 and steady progress has been made in a number of respects (see the following section). The measures set out in this Action Plan represent further intensification of the existing programme on the basis of the report of the National Anti-Litter Forum. The Action Plan represents an ambitious, but attainable, blueprint for action.

The National Anti-Litter Forum will continue its work. The Forum Chairman has been invited to convene a Steering Group to advise on the practical arrangements for this, and this work is underway.

The Forum will monitor and report on progress in relation to implementation of the Action Plan and perform other functions as identified for it in the Action Plan; an annual progress report will be prepared by the Forum. As indicated earlier, a key part of the Forum’s future work will be to fully engage business in assisting to fund anti-litter measures.

The Action Plan will be kept under regular review by Ministers and by the Forum. The future work of the Forum will assist Ministers in determining further measures to be included in the Action Plan.

Litter Action 1997-2000

Since taking office, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government and Minister of State Dan Wallace have made litter eradication a priority area for action. Local authorities, who are responsible for the primary management and enforcement responses to the litter problem, have stepped-up enforcement action over the same period (more litter wardens employed, prosecutions taken and on-the-spot fines issued) and have increased expenditure on their street cleansing and litter warden services - a total of £32 million was spent in 1999 compared to £27 million the previous year and some £20 million in 1997.

From 1997, Ministers have also pursued a targeted programme of anti-litter initiatives at a total cost of over £2 million to support the strengthened local authority action against litter.

This has included:

- allocating £1.4 million to local authorities for anti-litter initiatives to promote public awareness/education about litter,
- allocating £250,000 on co-funding the An Taisce-led National Spring Clean campaigns in 1999 and 2000, which ran for the month of April in both years,
- providing £250,000 for the development of a National Litter Pollution Monitoring System to monitor and assess local authority litter management and enforcement action and to advise on litter management planning at national level,
- establishing the National Anti-Litter Forum to promote greater sectoral involvement, in particular on the part of the business and commercial sectors, in anti-litter action, and
- increasing the on-the-spot fine for alleged offences under the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 from £25 to £50, with effect from 3 January 2000.

In addition, the Department of the Environment and Local Government has spent a further £160,000 since 1997 on various public awareness/advertising initiatives, the development of anti-litter materials and leaflets, and the printing/publication of national litter surveys, etc.

Ministers are convinced that Ireland's litter problem must, and can, be tackled successfully. To do so will require full implementation of the measures set out in this Litter Action Plan, building on the progress made to date. Ministers are calling on all sectors and on individual citizens to support and help to implement the Action Plan, as the cornerstone of a collective national effort, on a partnership basis, to eradicate litter pollution.

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