

Consider the Impact of Litter in our Streams

Litter in our streams can be detrimental to water quality and wildlife habitat. As litter accumulates, it floats on the water's surface blocking sunlight. Some trash may break down overtime but will use up valuable oxygen in the process. Plastics will slowly fragment into smaller pieces but never leave the environment completely. In either case, toxins and chemicals can leach into the water from these materials. These leached chemicals and micro-plastics may then be ingested by wildlife. Entanglement in stream litter is also a risk for our local wildlife like a great blue heron becoming wrapped up in old fishing line.

How does so much litter end up in our streams? While some of it is dumped with intention or left behind from laziness, much of it is accidental. Wind and rain are strong forces that pick up loose trash and eventually carry it to our streams or wash it down a storm drain that leads to the stream. Here are a few proactive steps you can take to prevent litter from entering our environment.

- **Bag it before you Trash it!** When throwing away your trash, make sure that it's bagged up before being placed in the dumpster. When the bags of trash are dumped from the bin to the truck, a strong breeze could whisk away loose items.
- **Secure the Lid!** Double check that lids are securely shut on dumpsters and trash bins. Use a bungee cord or heavy weight if needed to prevent the wind from blowing the lid open or a hungry raccoon from making a mess.
- **Dispose of Trash in the Trash Can!** Always throw trash away in the proper receptacle. If you're on a hike, don't leave behind your snack wrapper. If you've put out a cigarette, don't leave it on the ground. Take it a step further and think about spaces like your car. When you stuff a straw wrapper in the car door or toss a plastic bag in the back seat, next time you open the door it's at risk of falling out or getting blown away.
- **Don't Release Balloons!** What goes up, must come down. Balloons land in streams, get tangled in trees, and even pose a risk to grazing livestock who may accidentally consume this deflated piece of rubber after it lands in the pasture.
- **Reduce the Creation of Trash!** Is there trash that we produce regularly that could be replaced with a reusable item? Reusable water bottles, food containers, and straws are a great place to start!

While these are great preventative measures, litter already exists in our environment. Grab a bag, a pair of gloves, and a few friends and make a day of cleaning up your local stream, street, or park. Be safe and avoid particularly nasty or sharp items without proper protection.