



# Secure Your Load for Safer Roads

## Fact Sheet

### Litter on State Highways

- 12 million pounds of litter is tossed or blown onto Washington roadways every year.
- Up to 40%- almost 5 million pounds - comes from unsecured cargo and debris that falls or is blown out of pickup truck beds, trailers, and boats.
- Ecology-funded litter pickup programs (Ecology Youth Corps, Community Litter Cleanup Program, Washington departments of Corrections, Natural Resources, and Fish and Wildlife) collected more than 4.5 million pounds of litter and cleaned 21,581 miles of road, statewide, in 2020.
- This was despite COVID-19 restrictions, which significantly limited pickup efforts.
- Ecology Youth Corps typically cleans nearly 5,000 miles of roadway and collects more than a million pounds of litter per year.
- Nearly 2,000 miles and just more than 616,000 pounds in 2020.
- In the past year, litter from PPE – like disposable masks and gloves – has increasingly shown up in parking lots, public spaces and along roads and highways. In one area of I-5 in King County, an Ecology litter crew found approximately 60 masks per mile.
- Some litter contains harmful chemicals that can leech into waterways and hurt our wildlife.
- The Washington State Department of Transportation spends \$4 million a year cleaning the state's roads and highways and Ecology spends another 4.5 million a year on pickup efforts.
- Other state agencies and local jurisdictions invest in the litter problem as well, so roads are safe for travelers.

### Safety Hazards for Drivers

- The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration reports that in 2019, crashes involving road debris resulted in:
  - 739 deaths
  - 17,367 injuries
  - 89,915 property damage crashes
- Every year in Washington unsecured loads cause about 300 traffic crashes and 30 injuries.
- A 20-pound object, like a TV, at 55 mph has a force of 1,000 pounds at impact.
- In an average year, Washington State Patrol pulls over more than 1,000 drivers and writes more than 350 citations for unsecured loads and debris falling from vehicles.

## Preventing Unsecured Loads

- Cargo nets and straps are easy and effective solutions to secure many types of vehicle loads and prevent road hazards.
- Throughout the campaign, up to 50 statewide retail partners will promote load securing equipment through product displays and distribute an educational flyer highlighting best practices for securing loads.
- Everyone has a part to play in preventing unsecured loads:
  - Cover and secure loads in vehicles, pickup trucks and trailers.
  - Have conversations with your friends and family if you see them not properly securing their load. Help influence the correct behavior.
  - Keep a litter bag in your vehicle.
  - Clean out any loose garbage that could fly out of your truck bed, trailer, or boat while driving.

## Emphasis Patrols

- It is illegal in Washington state to travel with an unsecured vehicle load.
- The start of the We Keep Washington Litter Free campaign is timed with the National Secure Your Load Day on June 6, which commemorates people whose lives were impacted or taken by unsecured loads and encourages drivers to properly secure their loads every time they drive.
- As a part of the campaign, state troopers are conducting emphasis patrols across the state for four consecutive weekends, starting May 28 and ending June 20.
- Fines for littering and unsecured loads range from \$50 to \$5,000. If an item falls out and causes bodily harm or property damage, the driver could also face gross misdemeanor charges and jail time.
- The Washington State Department of Transportation will have messaging on their electronic highway signs reminding residents to secure their load for safer roads.