

# CHEWING GUM LITTER

**Chewing gum litter** is ubiquitous appearing on streets and pavements around the country. Whilst the presence of freshly littered 'balled' gum is low, it presents a particular issue when it sticks to paved areas. This gum 'staining' is seen in many locations, it is unsightly and with removal costs of around £1.50 per gum stain, leads to substantial costs for local authorities.

## What does Keep Britain Tidy want to achieve?

Keep Britain Tidy wants to see gum littering substantially reduced by 2020 and all but eradicated by 2030.

## What will Keep Britain Tidy do?

**Keep Britain Tidy** will continue to work with the chewing gum industry and government through the Chewing Gum Action Group or CGAG. We will seek to prioritise new research and innovation that can be scaled to provide national solutions to gum littering.

**Keep Britain Tidy** will seek to work with the chewing gum industry and government to develop a national gum littering campaign, raising awareness of the issue, particularly amongst young people and smokers

**Keep Britain Tidy** will continue to promote novel solutions such as the ability to collect and recycle gum into plastic polymers and seek opportunities to scale these schemes.

## How can other organisations help?

### Government

We want government (DCLG and Defra) to develop policy introducing the concept of extended producer responsibility for gum industry, ensuring the industry bears the cost of gum litter interventions and prevention campaigns.

### Chewing Gum Industry

We want the main industry bodies to continue to engage actively in the development and funding of schemes and campaigns such as CGAG aimed at preventing chewing gum litter, in particular supporting new innovation and research that can be scaled up into national solutions e.g. recycling of gum, packaging that doubles as wrappers for used gum.

### Local Authorities

We want all Local Authorities to ensure that bins are provided in sufficient quantity particularly in retail and commercial areas where gum littering is more prevalent. Also to consider whether bins with secure and separate compartments for gum (allowing recycling of gum) are viable and cost effective in these high footfall areas.

We want all Local Authorities to ensure that Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) are issued for littering of gum when it is observed – as yet there are no instances of gum litterers being issued with FPNs.

We want all Local Authorities to work with us in rolling out new interventions which prove effective in eradicating gum littering and further support these interventions by removing gum staining from paved surfaces in pilot project locations.

## Background to the issue of chewing gum litter

Various types of gum has been chewed for thousands of years, although the synthetic rubber gums used today evolved in the 20th Century as gum chewing increased in popularity and natural sources of gum became scarce.

The Wrigley company (a subsidiary of Mars) dominates gum sales in the UK and its best-selling brand 'Extra' gum generates sales of

over £200m. Other gum manufacturers with market share in the UK include Perfetti Van Melle and Cadbury.

Gum manufacturers have been positive in promoting solutions, setting up the Chewing Gum Action Group with Defra and local authority partners and investing financially in solutions – in particular through contributions from the Wrigley company.

This work has largely focused to date on marketing led advertising campaigns running for a short period of time each year in a number of partnering local authorities. Each campaign results in a significant drop in gum littering behaviour with reported reduction of up to 50%. However, the longer term impact of these campaigns once they cease is unknown.

Fresh balled gum only appears on around 5% of sites surveyed by Keep Britain Tidy, yet gum staining appears on over 60% of sites surveyed, particularly in retail and commercial areas. This indicates that gum littering itself is perhaps not as prevalent as cigarette or fast food littering but its capacity to dry and stick to pavements leads to higher incidences of observed gum staining.

The Local Government Association estimates that each piece of gum costs 3p to buy but £1.50 to clean up, leading to an annual £60 million clean-up bill for Local Authorities. Each piece of gum staining has to be individually cleaned using detergents and steam to agitate each piece of gum for a few seconds breaking it up.

The industry has been investing in biodegradable and non-sticky gums, although as yet these are not marketed. In addition, whilst the issue of gum staining would be prevented, gum itself would still be littered, most likely finding its way into our rivers and oceans.

Singapore in particular has taken a hard-line approach banning all gum, except that used for dental health purposes.

### **Why do people litter their gum waste?**

Chewing gum litter is not something which people can easily carry with them once they have finished chewing. In the absence of a bin people are required to keep chewing or wrap the gum in paper or foil if they have some and keep it with them until they find a bin.

Whilst gum did used to be sold in individually wrapped pieces, affording a piece of paper for wrapping gum prior to disposal this is largely no longer the case. In addition, creating additional packaging does not accord with our goals to reduce waste and unnecessary packaging.

The fact that there is no public record of FPNs being issued for gum littering suggests that the action of littering is quick and also limited in frequency (5% of sites have freshly littered gum) making detection and enforcement difficult.

This suggests that prevention needs to focus on both personal responsibility and the provision of facilities for disposal.