

Case Study: Keeping an eye on it

Successfully reducing dog fouling in hotspots

What is the problem?

Dog fouling is a priority litter issue for local authorities. Dog fouling has declined in recent years but is viewed as the most unacceptable and offensive type of litter on our streets. Local authorities therefore still receive a high volume of complaints from residents, and many hotspots, such as alleyways and parks, can be blighted by dog fouling.

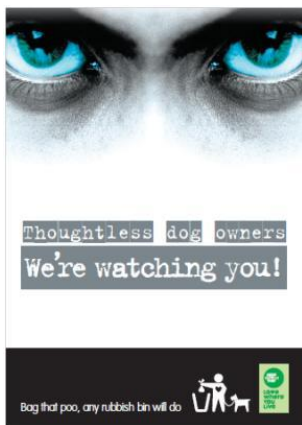
Incidents of dog fouling tend to occur more frequently at night-time and in areas that are not overlooked, such as alleyways. Incidents also tend to increase in the winter under the cover of darkness. It is widely felt that some dog owners act irresponsibly when they think they aren't being watched and can 'get away with it'.

Developing a solution

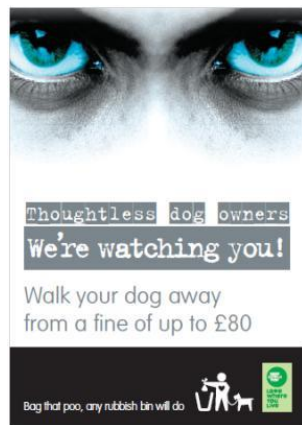
Interventions based on the theory that people behave better when they think they are being watched have been successful in encouraging socially desirable behaviours in other contexts, such as encouraging people to pay into an honesty box and preventing bicycle theft¹. However, the approach had never been tested for the discouragement of dog fouling or other litter related activities such as fly-tipping. Therefore, between December 2013 and March 2014, Keep Britain Tidy partnered with 17 local land manager organisations across England² to design and deliver an experiment to test the use of posters displaying a

'watching eyes' image at dog fouling 'hotspots' for this purpose.

A series of A3-size 'watching eyes' posters were developed using a luminescent film that 'charged up' during the day and glowed-in-the-dark to increase their visibility at night. Four versions of the poster were tested in the experiment, using a range of supporting messages to test whether these influenced the effectiveness of the posters in preventing dog fouling.



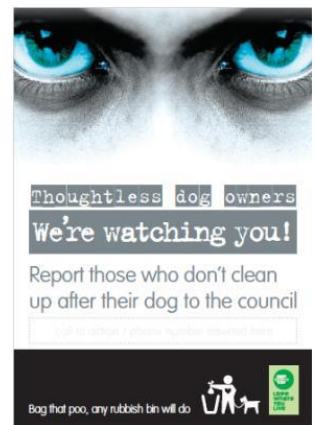
Poster 1: eyes only – Testing the 'watching eyes' in its most basic state (i.e. without an additional supporting message).



Poster 2: enforcement – Testing the 'watching eyes' with a supporting enforcement message.



Poster 3: positive reinforcement – Testing the 'watching eyes' with a supporting positive (social norming) reinforcement message.



Poster 4: peer influence – Testing the 'watching eyes' with a supporting peer influence message.

The posters were tested at 128 target sites across 17 partner areas. Each version of poster was tested in isolation to minimise the risk of dog walkers seeing more than one version of the supporting message. The target sites were dog fouling hotspots identified by the

partners and included a range of land use types, such as residential housing areas, recreation areas, public footpaths and alleyways. Partners displayed up to five copies of the poster per site; the size of the target site was determined by the points at which the eyes on the posters were clearly visible.

The testing involved partners monitoring counts of dog fouling incidents at each of their target sites for three weeks prior to the installation of the posters and for a further three weeks once installed. At the same time, partners monitored incidents of dog fouling at nearby

sites where no posters were displayed to identify any occurrences of 'displacement', whereby a target site experiences a decrease in dog fouling but a nearby site experiences an increase, indicating that the posters had simply pushed the problem elsewhere.

What were the results?

The experiment found that the 'watching eyes' posters approach was highly effective in reducing dog fouling at both the target sites and potential displacement sites. The average change in incidents of dog fouling at target and displacement sites (taking both increases and decreases into account) was a 46% decrease per site. In fact, dog fouling incidents fell from an average 17 incidents to 9 incidents per site per week following the installation of the posters.

Of the four versions of poster, the positive reinforcement message (Poster 3) was the most effective in decreasing incidents of dog fouling (an average 49% reduction overall), however all versions were effective.

Dog fouling decreased at all land use types tested, however the posters were significantly less effective when used at social housing and public footpath sites. We suggest therefore using the posters at these sites alongside other behavioural interventions, such as social marketing, education and enforcement.



In-depth feedback interviews with the partners found that they were overwhelmingly satisfied with the experiment and results, and the majority planned to continue using the posters to prevent dog fouling in some way. For example, several partners planned to use the posters on a rotational basis, targeting different dog fouling 'hotspot' areas for one month at a time.

Taking the campaign further

Keep Britain Tidy launched a national campaign using the posters in November 2014 and again in March 2015, in which more than 70 local authorities and other land managers partnered with us to deliver the approach in their areas. The posters form part of a 'campaign in a box' package, including 40 posters

customised with council partner branding, guidelines and tools for implementation and monitoring, template press releases and full PR support. Impacts of the posters will continue to be monitored to assess their longer-term effectiveness in driving down incidences of dog fouling across England.

Endnotes:

1. Nettle, Nott & Bateson, "Cycle Thieves, We Are Watching You": Impact of a Simple Signage Intervention against Bicycle Theft, 2012. The 'watching eyes' approach has also been used in experiments to encourage donations to charities in supermarkets and responsible litter disposal in cafeterias.
2. The experiment partners were Amey (Sheffield), Birmingham City Council, Cambridge City Council, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, North West Leicestershire District Council, Portsmouth City Council, Reading Borough Council, Rochford District Council, Sandwell Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Telford and Wrekin Council, Wellingborough Norse Group and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.