

# Mr. Road Show: Litter on State Highways

## San Jose Mercury News (9/20/05)

**Q** Friends from Canada comment that Americans consider their environment one big trash can. In Canada, harsh penalties are imposed for littering. The rest of society gangs up on people they see throwing trash. Perhaps we could impose a little more social pressure. However, how do you run after someone in a car? There should be a hotline we can call to report egregious offenders.

*Debra Korbel  
San Jose*

**A** There is. Call 1-800-TELL-CHP or e-mail the CHP through its Web page at [www.chp.ca.gov](http://www.chp.ca.gov). Just jot down the license plate number, location, date and time along with a basic car description. The CHP can't ticket these folks unless they witness the offending act, but they can send the registered owner a warning letter that may make the driver think twice before pitching trash on our roads. There are plenty to ticket. One day last week, the CHP inspected 96 garbage trucks and issued 184 tickets ranging from tarp to litter violations.

**Q** How much does it cost taxpayers for the cleanup by Caltrans? This should be the advertising point with the "Don't Trash California" campaign.

*Ruth Knipe*

**A** The state spends \$40 million a year on cleanup -- enough to pay for new ramps at the 152-156 intersection east of Gilroy and at I-880 at Stevens Creek Boulevard in San Jose. Last Thursday, Caltrans spent \$31,280 to haul 5,105 30-gallon trash bags to the dump for one day's work cleaning Bay Area freeways. Last month on the central coast, Caltrans spent another \$200,000 removing litter in eight locations.

**Q** You've had people write in regarding why they speed, tailgate, violate the carpool lane, talk on the phone, drive SUVs and pretty much everything else. Can any readers say why they litter our freeways? As absurd as it sounds, I fully expect people to have some bizarre, inane rationalization for littering highways.

*Lito Valderrama  
San Jose*

**A** A very good idea, but I doubt many litterbugs have the courage to publicly admit their guilt and offer a reason for pitching garbage out the window of a car.

**Q** Perhaps the \$1,000 fine should be changed to a mandatory 1,000 minutes (hours!) picking up trash? Perhaps that would change attitudes. . . . We were in North Carolina and South Carolina for vacation two months ago. The interstates were not only pretty, they were clean. Yes, the occasional piece of litter was there, but it was a rare sight. We also clearly noticed signs along the freeway in South Carolina that said: ``\$1,000 fine for littering. AND PRISON.

*Ernest Cook, Harry Cooper and more*

**A** Hmm. Now that sign might get some attention.

**Q** Maybe Caltrans could not clean up the freeways for a few months to make a point. It might show the slobs what a bunch of slobs they are.

*Rich Garlow  
Sunnyvale*

**A** I both like and fear your idea. Like: a six-month ban on collecting trash would show how messy we are. Fear: six months would really show how messy we really are.

**Q** Since retiring in 1999, I have a routine of going to McDonald's for breakfast. Sitting in the parking lot at Brokaw Road and Oakland Road is quite an education. Litterbugs abound, male and female, and come in all colors and nationalities. I see people throwing trash on the ground from cars, on foot and many times right next to a trash can. Do they live like this at home? From where I sit in the morning, littering is equal to laziness.

*Fred Matsumoto  
San Jose*

**A** Lazy describes it well.