

Spring reveals signs of Pickering litterbugs

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Pickering -- Curtis Armstrong, a City of Pickering parks department maintenance worker, cleaned up some illegal roadside dumping along Concession Road 3. The city is releasing their new program, Heart Your City, which asks residents to pledge to never litter or illegally dump and encourage others to live the same. April.

Pickering -- With the snow recently melted, coffee cups, cigarette butts, takeout bags and more litter seems to be everywhere.

“It’s probably five months of accumulation,” says Rob Gagen, City of Pickering supervisor of parks operations. “Basically all my staff are out there litter picking everything now because of the snow melt. The garbage truck’s going full time right now. As calls come in we’re cleaning up items as well.”

The City recently launched The ‘Heart Your City’ Facebook campaign in an attempt to tackle littering and illegal dumping, and to educate the community on ways to keep Pickering clean, beautiful and litter-free.

“It just makes the community look bad in general,” Jeff Goring, acting coordinator of environmental awareness programs, says of litter and dumping.

Residents are asked to take the online pledge to not litter or dump, and to encourage friends and family to follow their lead. Those who take the pledge will be entered into a draw for a new iPhone 6, provided by Veridian. Those who 'like' the City of Pickering on Facebook at [facebook.com/cityofpickering](https://www.facebook.com/cityofpickering) and take the pledge, will receive messages focused on environmental awareness programs and initiatives, responsible disposal of unwanted items, and operations and enforcement surrounding littering and illegal dumping.

Not only is littering and dumping unattractive, it strains municipal resources. Ultimately, residents and businesses pay the price as crews that clean up and dispose of garbage are funded through property taxes.

"Our garbage pickup in parks and roadside pickup is a full-time job," says Mr. Gagen.

Since it uses multiple City resources, it would be near impossible to put a dollar figure on the cost of litter cleanup, but it adds up, says Mr. Gagen.

"It's the staff, it's the vehicle, the wear and tear," he says.

Dedicating more staff resources to clean up other people's responsibilities doesn't address the root cause of the problem, nor is it sustainable in the long run, says the City.

"If you had love for your city you wouldn't be doing it," said Mr. Goring.

A lot of members of the public will call and complain the City isn't emptying garbage bins that seem to be filling up but the real problem is people continue to dispose of their household waste in public garbage bins. The City receives calls and will go out to that garbage bin to empty it.

"A day later the resident is calling, saying that we did nothing. We go back there and sure enough, it's full of garbage again," says Mr. Gagen.

It's almost as if people do a spring cleanup and dump items from outside of the house such as branches, pulled weeds and flowers into rivers and streams.

"It surprises me the effort people will make to dump when it's probably less effort to bundle up and put it on their curb," he says.

The City also finds hazardous waste, such as liquids and paints, being dumped.

"You can't just throw it in the garbage," he says.

Sorting through unknown hazardous materials also requires extra resources and staff time.

“The thing that bugs me about that is there’s a place that it can be taken to and dealt with for free,” says Mr. Gagen, referring to the hazardous waste collection events that are put on by the Region of Durham in various municipalities.

The litter being dumped in the rivers and streams is also hard on the fish that the City works to help repopulate.

“If people keep throwing garbage in there it affects the environment and species in Pickering,” says Mr. Goring.

Mr. Gagen says some residents are so bothered by litter, they will take plastic bags with them on walks to pick up other people’s trash.

“There are people that it obviously bugs enough that they’re doing something about it themselves.”

He’d like to see more of the public attempting to fix the problem by one simple way: reporting it to the City’s customer care department at 905-683-7575.

“I encourage people who see illegal dumping to report it. There doesn’t seem to be enough of that anymore,” he says.

The City hopes the campaign will change people’s attitudes so they choose not to litter or dump in the first place.

Mr. Goring encourages people to participate in the 20-minute makeover on Friday, April 24 at 2 p.m. Businesses, groups and residents are encouraged to take 20 minutes out of their day to help clean up the city. Visit the event calendar at www.cityofpickering.com for more information.

HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

- Littering and illegal dumping costs taxpayers as City crews are needed to clean it up constantly.
- Hazardous waste dumped illegally can harm the environment and wildlife.
- New Facebook campaign encourages residents to take the pledge to not litter or dump.

Kristen Calis covers Pickering and writes a pet column for the Metroland Media Group’s Durham Region Division. Anyone with upcoming animal charity events that they would like listed in Kristen’s Kritters can e-mail kcalis@durhamregion.com.