

## Safety Corner - Roadside Cleanup Requires Some Care

Littering is [illegal](#) in Delaware. That said, you can install all the No Littering signs you want, but there is still going to be roadside litter. Some comes from scofflaws that simply don't care. Some is less nefarious; the napkin that catches the wind through an open window or the coffee cup in the bed of a pickup. It can even escape our municipal and private fleet of refuse collection vehicles.



Regardless, the Keep America Beautiful 2020 National Litter [Study](#) found more than 2,000 pieces of litter per mile along studied roadways and waterways. The common items - cigarette butts (still the leader, but falling), fast food wrappers and containers, beverage containers, masks, and cardboard. Overall, litter dropped by 54% in a decade, but it's still pervasive.

So, many communities have some form of roadside cleanup, either through roadway crews or Adopt-a-Highway type programs. These activities can be a little risky and some care is needed before they begin. Our tailgate safety talk can be a good briefing outline for the crews before they head out.



Normal roadside safety is the first concern. There is, of course, the danger of nearby traffic, and so high visibility gear is essential. Preferably, everyone should be wearing retroreflective safety vests.

The roadside (or waterways) is often sloping and/or uneven ground. Grippy and water-resistant footwear is advised; closed-toe should be a requirement. And falling down in this environment can pose greater problems than on level ground, so slow and steady wins this race.

Gloves are recommended but be careful of a sense of security. Those latex gloves are great for keeping icky stuff off your fingers (until they rip), but they won't guard against sharp objects, so still watch where you're sticking your fingers.



Pests, of course, can be an issue, depending on the season. Sprays, long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and hats should all be considered. For the more reactive species, such as snakes, care should be taken when overturning larger objects; don't surprise them and you'll probably be fine.

Dead animals. First, be sure it's dead. An injured animal, even a small one, can be dangerous. If, in fact, it has met its demise, handling should still be done carefully with proper protective gear and cleanup.

Let's talk a little about hazardous materials. These can come in many forms and simply

being situationally aware can go a long way. Obviously, if there's a drum with a skull and cross bones on it, you're in over your head and it's time to touch base with law enforcement and/or the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control ([DNREC](#)). But there are many other dangerous items to look out for that also demand that you call in folks who know how to investigate and remove them. Needles are one obvious item, and they can crop up often; certainly, if they are more than just a syringe, they should go directly into a sharps container rather than the trash.

Drug users tend not to waste their product, but they care not about the residue that can be on their stamp bags and other discarded paraphernalia. As a non-user, even a small touch of this residue can put you in the hospital or worse. If you see it, step back and call the authorities.

While the cooking of crystal methamphetamine is on a minor scale in Delaware, at least as of the last DEA Intelligence [Report](#) (we apparently prefer to import our meth), the small, one-pot style production labs still produce a lot of dangerous refuse that they are fond of getting rid of along roadways, in parks, or wherever no one is seemingly looking. The list of things to look out for is lengthy, and an older but still relevant Colorado [video](#) does a nice job of highlighting them, it is also important to be on the lookout for signs that they are nasties – distressed and colored vegetation are among the signs to look for. Bottom line, if in doubt about an odd assortment of debris, step away and put a call into the authorities to let the professionals have a look.



The so-called “Crying Indian” [advertisement](#) from 1971 is said to have been effective at reducing littering with the underlying message that litter is pollution and is largely a conscious decision. Skip ahead to today and the message seems to have fallen by the wayside some, so roadside cleanup remains part of the mitigation. But do so with care, because there is risk in the activity.