

FACT SHEET

LITTER – HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BREAKDOWN?



Have you ever thrown an apple core from your car window onto a roadside with the thought, 'It will decompose' or, 'the birds will eat it'?

In fact, organic litter can take months to breakdown in the environment and as well as attracting animals to the dangerous roadside, ingesting decomposing rubbish can be harmful to pets and wildlife.

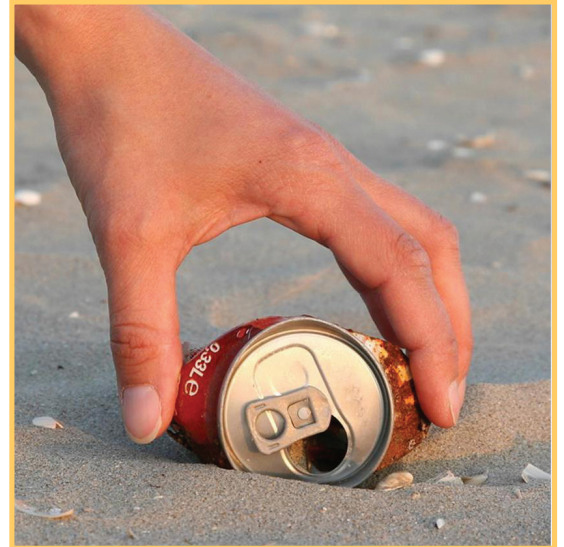
Litter degradability depends on a range of factors including climate and conditions. The table below gives some estimated waste product decomposition times.

WASTE PRODUCT DECOMPOSITION TIME

Item	Breakdown time
Banana skin	3–4 weeks
Paper bag	1 month
Cardboard	2 months
Apple core	1–2 months
Aluminium cans	> 1 million years
Orange peel	Up to 2 years
Cigarette butts	Up to 12 years
Plastic bags	* Up to 20 years
Plastic bottle	* 450 years
Glass	1–2 million years

* Petrochemical products never truly breakdown and remain in the environment forever.

For information on litter breakdown in the marine environment visit www.oceancare.org.au.



LITTERING IS ILLEGAL

Legally, throwing out organic material like apple cores in public places is the same as throwing paper or cigarette butts. The law doesn't distinguish between organic and artificial waste.

Under the *Litter Act 1979* you can be fined \$200 for the incorrect disposal of organic material.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP REDUCE LITTER

- Find a bin and put your litter in or have a car litter bag in your car to dispose of rubbish appropriately.
- If you are in an area with no bins, carry a bag and take it with you when you leave to discard later.
- Make a difference by registering to become a Litter Reporter or join the Adopt-a-Spot program to adopt a site to keep litter-free.

For more information on
Keep Australia Beautiful
programs visit
www.kabc.wa.gov.au
or phone 6364 7210

REFERENCES

Queensland Litter Prevention Alliance: http://www.qldlitter.com/litter_facts3.php