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Who Litters and Why?

By Dylan Kennedy

The MountainKeepers mission is to work alongside High Country residents to champion initiatives and efforts that help communities in the area to become more sustainable. A key component in MountainKeeper activities has been the Stop the Litter! campaign. To help MountainKeepers in their efforts, I have been conducting survey research to gain some perspective on the opinions of local residents about litter and recycling practices.

The survey was administered to 48 individuals in March and April 2007. The surveys were given to Ingles grocery store customers, ASU students in Trivette Cafeteria, and a handful of ASU faculty and staff. Respondents ranged from 18 to 64 years old, and slightly more women than men completed the survey. From the collected data, results were calculated using statistical software, and some surprising statistics stood out.

First and foremost, the survey revealed honest responses, with almost 90 percent of participants admitting frankly to having littered. Of this percentage, 65 percent responded that convenience was the main motive behind their actions, with approximately 40 percent stating that cigarette butts were their main littered product.

The survey also included a section on why people feel that they should *not* litter. The overwhelming majority agreed that the main reason not to litter was because “it looks bad.” This is not surprising because most people in the High Country do seem to respect natural beauty and the outdoors.

Nearly two-thirds of all participants said that they did currently recycle some items, which suggests that most people do have some concern with waste buildup. Additionally, a strong majority (73 percent) agreed that they would recycle if there were a refund on beverage containers (such as proposed in “bottle bills”).

The results from this survey can aid MountainKeepers in designing prospective anti-litter campaigns that will be well targeted and therefore more successful. Clearly, targeting cigarette butts as the most common form of litter makes sense. Additionally, this survey revealed that aesthetics may be the most powerful argument in this community to use in discouraging litter.