



Bureau of Land Management
Environmental Education
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Teaching Leave No Trace

Principle #3: Pack it in, Pack it out

Pack It In, Pack It Out:

This common saying is a simple yet effective way to get backcountry visitors to take their trash home with them. There is no reason why people cannot carry out of the backcountry the extra food and packing materials which they carried in with them in the first place. The litter situation in many backcountry areas is better than it was 10-20 years ago; however, litter



continues to be a problem.

Though most trash and litter in the backcountry is not significant in terms of the long term ecological health of an area, it does rank high as a problem in the minds of many backcountry visitors.

Trash and litter are primarily social impacts which can greatly detract from the naturalness of an area.

Reduce litter at the

source: Much backcountry trash and litter originates from food items. Perhaps the easiest way to practice the principle of Pack it In, Pack it Out is to plan ahead and prepare. It is possible to leave most potential trash at home if you take the time to properly prepare food supplies. Reduce the volume of trash you have to pack out and save weight by repackaging

solid food into plastic bags
and liquids into reusable
containers.

Another good idea is to keep your menu simple. For short trips, consider not taking a stove and taking only food that requires no cooking. This significantly reduces backpack weight and excess food packaging taken into the backcountry. Your first preference for dealing with trash should be to pack it out. Much trash is non able and not all outdoor settings are acceptable for building fires. Areas are often closed to fires due to high fire hazards or excessive campsite damage. Some areas, such as desert settings, are impractical for fires due to the scarcity of firewood.

Under no circumstance should food scraps be buried! Discarded or buried food scraps becomes attractive to small animal life which live in the area. It is common to see chipmunks, ground squirrels, and various species of birds gathering around camp kitchens. These camp robbers have become habituated to campers as a food source. Human food is not natural to wild animals and their natural feeding cycles and habits have become disturbed. A contentious no-trace camper always keeps a clean camp.

Special Considerations for Bear Country: When traveling in bear country, whether there are black bears or grizzly bears present, the disposal of garbage takes on a new significance. The primary concern here is safety, both for the visitor and for the bear. Personal safety is the first priority; a bear can be a very dangerous animal if provoked or habituated to humans. Safety of the bear is also a concern. Once a bear is habituated to people, usually because it associates people with food, it can rapidly become a problem bear and will have to be dealt with actively, sometimes at the expense of its life. Though black bears present less of a threat to the personal safety of backcountry visitors than grizzly bears, the potential for personal injury does exist and preparations should be taken.

Messy kitchens and food odors can attract bears. Kitchens should be placed at least 100 feet from tent sites and, if possible, near streams or rivers. A conscientious low-impact camper always keeps a clean camp whether there are bears in the area or not. If you suspect bears are in the area, food must be kept at least 100 feet from tent and kitchen sites and hung at least 10 feet off the ground between trees and 4 feet away from the trunks of the trees. All food items and trash must be hung. Even with this preparation black bears, who are adept at climbing, may still reach your food. Food brought to your tent invites danger to your sleeping area and food left in your pack may result in a destroyed pack as the bear searches for the source of food odors.

How Long Does it Last? Packing out trash is increasingly important as greater numbers of people visit the backcountry. Here are some estimated life expectancies for different kinds of litter.

- Paper: 2-4 Weeks
- Banana Peel: 3-5 Weeks
- Wool Cap: 1 Year
- Cigarette Butt: 2-5 Years
- Disposable Diaper: 10-20 Years
- Hard Plastic Container: 20-30 Years
- Rubber Boot Sole: 50-80 Years
- Tin Can: 80-100 Years
- Aluminum Can: 200-400 Years
- Plastic 6-pack Holder: 450 Years
- Glass Bottles: Lots and Lots of Years.

Think before you throw.

Remember to Pack it In, Pack it Out, and recycle.