

Sector Connector

Litter conscience

I try to do the right thing.



Being litter conscious

My litter conscience kicked in at a young age. I believe this was thanks to Keep South Australia Beautiful's (KESAB) work in schools in the 1960s and 70s, though details have faded from memory. Of course, KESAB continues to do good work.

Somehow, the litter message got through to me and stayed.

The notion of environmental sustainability was only just filtering into government language, so I think the message back then was not about sustainability as it often is now, but

about pride of place and modelling good citizenship.

In my defence

Not that I wear a halo. I have littered, so string me up if you like, but in my defence I was only being human. Moments of weakness, little more.

Under duress, we humans gravitate to the simplest solution. With littering, the threshold isn't very high – inconvenience is enough to tip us over the edge.

If possible though, we go for the choice that seems to have least impact,

or possibly some benefit. Examples are seeking littered places to litter in (it only adds a bit more) and dumping at charity stores (my rubbish is going to a worthy cause).

Bagful of messages

I don't remember what slogans were used back in SA, but 'Keep South Australia Beautiful' is a slogan and call to action in itself, not just an organisation name.

As a tagline, the angle is pretty clear, linking litter with looks. And notably, 'keep it beautiful' is an international phenomenon, with Keep America Beautiful and Keep Britain Tidy alongside our own Keep Australia Beautiful and its state chapters.

There's a colourful history of litter related slogans, and as serious a matter this is, they can be a lot of fun. Puns and wordplay abound!

Doing the right thing

Now, isn't 'do the right thing' an evergreen? The slogan was originally developed by the beverage industry, and has transcended its original purpose by becoming virtually synonymous with 'don't litter', without mentioning the 'L' word.

Not that it changes much. Influencing behaviours and getting the public to think the right way needs constant refreshing.

In Victoria, the refresh just happened in January with the launch of EPA Victoria and Sustainability Victoria's joint pilot campaign – *A cleaner Victoria is in your hands*.

Stick or carrot?

Litter campaigning highlights a tension between two schools of thought.

One is that we can change people's behaviour by appealing to their sense of personal responsibility. The other is that without the fear of shame or penalty, littering will continue.

Well, both are right. The trick to litter prevention, if there is one, is to sensibly integrate these two approaches.

Vicarious sticks

The umbrella message in *A cleaner Victoria is in your hands* is more about the carrot than the stick.

However, the campaign leverages off EPA Victoria's refreshed suite of litter reporting portals, namely 1300 EPA VIC, online reporting and a recently developed iPhone app.

This is the enforcement component, handed to everyone on a platter, including local authorities, and backed up with *A cleaner Victoria's* umbrella brand.

Better yet, recipients of recently announced Victorian Roadside Litter Prevention grants are getting training and support for their programs with a set of new tools produced by the Victorian Litter Action Alliance, a unique consortium of litter stakeholders managed by Sustainability Victoria.

It's complicated

Litter prevention may sound mundane to some, but it is complicated.

On the ground, you need to be a psychologist, engineer and legal eagle all in one. Higher up, the interests are not necessarily in the same realm. Some create the goods that become litter, and others remove it at considerable cost.

Litter campaigning has a very long history, and alas, is likely to have a long future as well. But we do seem to be getting better at it. ■



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