

Crackdown on litterbugs in our county

California Highway Patrol and Monterey Regional Waste Management in partnership to reduce litter on area roads and highways

The California Highway Patrol and the Monterey Regional Waste Management District (MRWMD) have joined forces to make area roads and highways cleaner. The two agencies have partnered to remind drivers not to throw litter out the window, especially lit cigarettes because of the great fire danger they pose. They are also making it easy for the public to report violations when they see them. The MRWMD operates the

www.KeepMontereyCountyClean.org web site that explains how to report a litter violation.

Information is then forwarded to the CHP for follow-up. More drivers are enjoying the spring weather with their windows rolled down, but they are reminded not to be tempted to toss out a cigarette butt. Sgt. Carl Churchfield of the Monterey CHP Office strongly advises:

“We will write it up. They are really easy to spot at night when the glowing butts look like a sparkler thrown out the window. People think what’s the big deal, but the bottom line is, it’s

dangerous, and it’s against the law.” Section 23111 of the California Vehicle Code states: “No person in any vehicle and no pedestrian shall throw or discharge from or upon any road or highway or adjoining area, public or private, any lighted or nonlighted cigarette, cigar, match, or any flaming or glowing substance.” The violation includes a mandatory fine of \$100 to \$1,000. Your vehicle could be impounded, and it’s a moving violation, which means insurance premiums can increase. Other Vehicle Code sections make it illegal to throw *anything* out of a vehicle. The government agency whose job it is to clean up that portion of the roadway can also bill you. The CHP does not have to witness you littering for the problem to come to its attention. The anti-litter website

www.KeepMontereyCountyClean.org, allows citizens to report violations they observe on local roadways. The web site features a form that asks for the date, time, location and license plate number of the vehicle that litter

was thrown from or that was observed illegally dumping trash on the side of the road. Sgt. Churchfield promises the information, the registered owner is contacted by the CHP and will receive a letter noting the violation and a reminder that had a peace officer witnessed the incident, the driver could have been cited. Hundreds of reports of litter incidents and illegal dumping violations have been sent to the website. Some have been forwarded to the local District Attorney for follow-up.

Public concern about keeping roads clean has a long history in this state. Vehicle Section 23111, enacted in 1970, is known as the “Paul Buzzo Act.” Paul Buzzo, an 11-year-old Californian at the that after his agency receives time, saw a TV commercial that stated it was against the law then to toss something burning from a vehicle if it landed on the road. He told his mom that roads don’t burn, and she suggested he write his assemblyman a letter. The youngster did, and as a result the

law was amended to include “adjoining area, public or private,” and was renamed in his honor. As the Monterey Peninsula is bordered by the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, keeping roads clean is particularly important.

Improperly disposed cigarette butts wash into storm drains and can then end up on the beach or in the ocean. Repeated studies of roadside litter and beach clean-ups have shown that cigarette butts are the most pervasive type of litter found in this country and around the world. The CHP and the MRWMD have made combating litter a priority. Both are founding members of the area multi-agency Litter Abatement Task Force, chaired by Carmel by-the-Sea Mayor Sue McCloud, who is also vice-chair of the MRWMD Board. Task force members meet every three months to focus on plans and programs to reduce litter and illegal dumping, and to evaluate the success of their efforts.