

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1409

As Reported by House Committee On:

Fisheries, Ecology & Parks

Title: An act relating to littering.

Brief Description: Defining "potentially dangerous litter" and making it a civil infraction to improperly dispose of potentially dangerous litter.

Sponsors: Representatives Upthegrove, Hunt and Clibborn.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Fisheries, Ecology & Parks: 2/7/03, 2/13/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Increases the penalty for the littering of potentially dangerous materials.
- Removes the requirement that the owners of vehicles and watercraft must keep a litter bag in his or her car or boat.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cooper, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buck, Hatfield, O'Brien, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

Littering, or the illegal dumping of waste material, is unlawful in Washington. Littering regulations are enforced on a sliding scale, with the amount of litter discarded dictating the level of penalty assessed.

Littering one cubic yard of material or more is a gross misdemeanor. Littering of less than one cubic yard, but more than one cubic foot, is a misdemeanor. Along with criminal sanctions, these violations may also require the litterer to pay a restitution of

twice the actual cost to clean up the illegally dumped waste, or \$50, whichever is greater.

Littering of most items in an amount of one cubic foot or less is a class 3 civil infraction. Class 3 civil infractions are subject to a fine of up to \$50, plus a court assessment. Littering of a cigarette, cigar, or other tobacco product that is capable of starting a fire is a class 1 civil infraction. A person found to be in violation of that section of law is subject to a fine of up to \$500, plus court assessments.

In addition to being a littering violation, it is a traffic code infraction to throw onto any highway glass bottles, glass, nails, tacks, wires, cans, or any other substance likely to injure a person, animal, or vehicle. This violation of the traffic code is subject to a civil fine of up to \$171.

It is also a fineable offense for the owner of a vehicle or watercraft to fail to keep a litter bag inside of his or her vehicle or vessel.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The maximum penalty for improperly disposing of potentially dangerous litter is \$500.

Potentially dangerous litter is defined as litter that is likely to injure a person or cause damage to a vehicle or other property. Potentially dangerous litter includes: (1) cigarettes, cigars, or other tobacco products that are capable of starting a fire; (2) glass; (3) containers and other products made of glass; (4) hypodermic needles and other sharp medical instruments; (5) raw human waste; and (6) nails and tacks.

It is no longer a traffic infraction to deposit substances likely to damage persons, animals, or vehicles onto a state highway, and it is no longer a fineable offense if the owners of vehicles and watercraft fail to keep a litter bag in his or her car or boat.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill did not address the requirement for vehicle and watercraft owners to have a litter bag in their automobiles or boats.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Washington's streets and highways should be kept not only safe, but clean as well. The Department of Ecology's Youth Corps (Youth Corps) hires good kids to pick up litter, but they often come across dangerous substances, including biohazards such as human feces, bottles of urine, and hypodermic needles. Bicyclists also complain of popping their tires on both broken glass littered on roadways and on tacks that are maliciously distributed on recreational trails.

The Youth Corps crews have been picking up an increasing amount of litter, but the roadways just keep getting dirtier. To prevent future littering the state needs to concentrate on prevention. One element of prevention is deterrence. And high penalties are a deterrence.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Upthegrove, prime sponsor; and Cullen Stephenson, Department of Ecology.