Beyond the One-shot Clean-up

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ABSTRACT

The Clean City Commission of Kansas City, Missouri, in conjunction with Keep America Beautiful, Inc., New York, has devised a four-front approach for sustaining litter reduction through changing behaviors and attitudes. These measures consist of devising ordinances that assign responsibilities for pick-up and containment of trash, introducing new technology and waste handling methods to improve solid waste clean-up and disposal, increasing educational awareness of the environment, and teaching persons new habits which can be learned and sustained and providing a fail-safe measure by which proper enforcement of litter ordinances can be maintained. To do this, the Commission is getting the facts about littering, involving the people, focusing on results of successful anti-litter projects, planning systematically through goals and objectives, and providing positive reinforcement (recognition) for jobs well done.

Since my background includes mostly work in the field of journalism, I would like to share with you some headlines and stories that relate to this discussion. You may have heard some of these, for they are quite recent.

**News item:** Things are getting tight at Loose Park...park usage has increased more than 50% this summer according to park administrators. Debris and litter are scattered throughout the parks...and a duck pond is no longer fit for ducks but instead is filled with cans and bottles.

**News item:** Woman found bitten by rats...a 67-year-old lady was listed in poor condition...having been found in her apartment with several rat bites on her body...her apartment was full of trash and bits of food.

**News item:** Litter source...man's best friend? In a random sampling of Kansas City, Missouri residents, dogs were listed as the #1 source of the litter problem. It was noted that although Kansas City has one of the best refuse collection divisions, it relies on plastic trash bags for collections.

News item: City spends millions to clean streets and parks. More than 4 million dollars will be spent this year on picking up litter and trash around Kansas City, and the list goes on. Just what kind of society are we living in today that allows a lady to be bitten by rats or the taxpayer to be bitten by the litterbug? Well, let's take a look.

**TODAY'S SOCIETY**

If one talks to a political scientist, the most common explanation given is that today's society has become stratified. Those with the ability to move, leave the city and move to the suburbs. The result is the loss of the tax base they once provided. The cities become the graveyards of the people who cannot pay the price to leave. Thus with limited resources, the cities are forced to provide for people who cannot...or will not...help themselves.

Social scientists from Stanford Research Institute explain the situation a little differently. They quote statistics that state that the increase in our society's mobility and affluence had lead to an inappropriate allocation of resources to remedy problems caused by this phenomenon. I will let the statistics speak for themselves.

Between 1960 and 1975, our population has increased about 16%, automobiles, 44%, inner-city passen-ger traffic, 78%, drivers under 25, 93%, recreational area visits, 350% and national park and seashore visits, 2,000%. In stating these figures, there is a direct relationship between the mobility and affluence increases and the substantial increases in consumption of food, beverages and other products while en route. Both as pedestrians and motorists.

This lifestyle development has been accompanied by similar magnitudes of growth in specialized outlets to serve these needs. Evidence in this respect shows that between 1960 and 1975 food outlets grew 470% and convenience stores more than 900%.

Compare these figures with allocations for city services, adjusted for inflation. In 1960, street cleaning and garbage collection was $7.00 per capita; in 1975, $8.30. Street cleaning on highways, $34.00 per capita in 1960 compared with $35.00 per capita in 1975. Local parks and recreation areas, $8.00 per capita in 1960; in 1975, $13.50.

What should be added in comparing these data is that parks and highways have increased in overall land area and use since 1960 and the per capita base has changed these as well, to reflect population increases.

What can be inferred from these data is that first, life-style trends will continue to rise in respect to mobility and affluence. As this happens, services to meet the demand for these developments will increase. Through that demand, given the increase in disposable containers for quick service food, we have raised the littering potential of the population.

Second, due to the rapid growth of the population affluence and mobility, litter-related maintenance activities of public agencies have not been able to keep pace with the litter generation rates and accumulations in recent years, except in communities where special priority has been assigned to this and other cleanliness functions.

Thus through an ongoing population, stratification and move towards affluence and mobility, cities and other public agencies are losing...
the battle against litter. When faced with these statistics and interpretations, many a public works official, health department official, or city sanitarian has said to himself “Is there an answer?” I would like to suggest one.

AN ORGANIZATION
– AN ANSWER

How many remember the television commercial with the Indian shedding a tear with the slogan “It’s a crying shame?” If you do, you may have noticed that the message was brought to you by the National Advertising Council and a group called Keep America Beautiful, Inc.

Keep America Beautiful (KAB) is just that—a not-for-profit, international public service organization working with citizen groups, governmental agencies, academic institutions and private industry to stimulate individual involvement in improving the environment.

In its 25th year, KAB has solicited and trained more than 130 communities in ways they can approach and deal with the litter problem. These methods have been drawn together in what KAB calls the clean community system, a system that, if followed and adapted to local surroundings, can bring results. But what of results? Many anti-litter programs are one-shot clean-ups, short-term remedies that provide immediate results, but then, after the anti-litter troops have left and the media cameras have focused elsewhere, return to their former littered states.

If you have a child and have ever taken him or her out on one of these clean-ups, or have been in one yourself, you know how discouraging it can be to return to the location one week later, if you are willing to, and see the area all littered again.

The clean community system, once adopted, is a community-owned and operated attempt to stage a continuous attack on the litter problem on four fronts. These emphasize a behaviorally based approach to changing people’s littering behavior and attitudes. It costs very little to become certified and operate the program. Once you are, the challenge to meet the littering problems can be shared by all.

THE CLEAN COMMUNITY SYSTEM

The first step in complying with the clean community system is setting up the commission itself. In Kansas City, a special task force who attended a KAB workshop made recommendations to the mayor as to who they thought should be included in the commission. In addition, the 12-member City Council was given an opportunity to pick one each of the commission which totals 30 members. Diversity is the key, and Kansas City has just that.

The first front of the clean community system is the revision and review of ordinances and laws that relate to containment of litter itself. Whose responsibility is it to clean sidewalks, alleyways or vacant lots? What is a good definition of litter? What kind of notices should be delivered before a fine is submitted and issued?

Not all these questions can be answered in one presentation. But let me say that through the clean community system, Kansas City has been able to draw from the experience of more than 20 cities that have submitted to us copies of ordinances that they have used to successfully contain litter. With area resources like these, cities can draw from a variety of good resources to draw up better laws. One cannot talk of revisions in litter ordinances without mentioning two things which lend themselves to controversy. The first issue is one of the courts. Why is it that so many cases are referred to the municipal courts in this country with ample evidence of violations and notices to affirm these violations, and when submitted to the courts are either continued or dismissed?

Case in point. Recently one of the city’s attorney’s assigned to the Property Conservation Division of Public Works failed to convict a property owner in violation of numerous litter and trash violations. Get this—because the property owner had incorporated and could not be proven the actual owner of the properties. The charges against the “corporation” representative were dismissed.

The state law on the matter states that officers or registered agents of the corporation cannot be held liable for acts of the corporation. Clearly this law will encourage the absentee slum landlord to seek incorporation. Such laws and practices must be changed or else the job of the sanitarian, and the lawyer (who also handles complaint cases and discrimination cases) will be all the more difficult.

The second item in discussing revisions in the laws, not just for cities, but for states as well, is what is called the bottle legislation. As those concerned with food handling and packaging understand, the battle is going on throughout the country regarding bottle legislation. Environmentalists claim bottle and can deposits are the only answer. The bottle and can industry claims that its alternative is best—that of taxation of businesses that contribute to the litter situation, such as fast-food restaurants, quick-service grocery chains and the more remotely related litter producers, the newspaper and napkin industries.

My only comment on the controversy is that of a question. Who are we trying to get to stop littering? The grocery store owner or the pedestrian and motorist? Somehow taxation of industry does not change attitudes; it only taxes those who are already taxed heavily and forces them to pay for the pick-up of litter that government must provide. Will not the over-taxed fast-food restaurant owner say that it is not his responsibility to clean up any longer since the city or the county or the state is getting paid to do it? If the taxation bills succeed in Colorado, California, Washington and elsewhere, perhaps we could see a greater decrease in litter, as the bottle bills have demonstrated. Perhaps not.

In any event, Keep America Beautiful may stand one way on this issue, but members of the clean community
system are not compelled to join with it. Each city, county and state taking on the model program may decide its own course of action.

The second front the commission under the clean community system is attacking is that of updating sanitation equipment and improving operations. Even the best equipment, when not used well, can prove more of a handicap in litter control than a benefit. This second frontal attack is as much an operational one as an additional technological one.

Case in point. As I mentioned earlier, a citizens' attitude survey of Kansas City residents showed that our most noteworthy source of litter in the city was our favorite friend, the dog.

What was the city to do? Members of the Kansas City, Missouri Commission, a 30-member layperson group appointed by the mayor, looked into the problem. One operational problem noticed from the start was that although there was a high correlation between trash collection days and the number of dogs loose in the streets (even though Kansas City has a leash law), no radio contact had been made between the Animal Control Division and the Refuse Collection Division. Radio control would most likely lead to the more effective identification of loose dogs, but previous attempts to get the two divisions in two different departments together had failed. Why? Because one could not depend on the other and thus had lost the desire to continue cooperation further.

As soon as the commission learned of the impasse, it set up a meeting between the two groups and soon the two were discussing their mutual problems. It was agreed in the first meeting that a new attempt would be made to work together once the Animal Control Division received new trucks and manpower. When it did, the cooperative venture paid off, and now both are in constant contact, willing to help out each other. Call it a watch-dog program, call it a miracle or call it whatever. The fact remains that the commission came in and presented a neutral side to the argument and some alternatives were finally accepted.

Motivation is the key in refuse collection as it is in other fields. Without proper motivation, the job gets old fast and the desire is lost. One of the important functions of the clean city commission is providing positive reinforcement for jobs well done. This can be in the form of performance awards or public recognition with a news story. Any pat on the back goes a long way.

Before leaving this subject of motivation and positive reinforcement, let me add that training can also be a good motivational tool. Encourage sanitarians to go to school or to specialized training classes. With the turnover in sanitarians, training becomes a matter of style rather than procedure. A person taught under another sanitarian's guidance is often prone to inherit both the good and the bad. Try blending the two, procedure and experience, into one training session. It makes a lot of sense. If I ever get to it, I have promised our environmental inspection unit an introductory slide presentation to indoctrinate its new personnel.

The third frontal attack in the clean community system is continuous public relations and education. Just what makes up an educational public relations campaign?

With litter containment we are talking about a vast audience — adults and children of all ages. We need materials that appeal to all of them. Brochures will suffice for the adult, as will training workshops that discuss the seven sources of litter: uncovered trucks, residential trash, uncovered and put out improperly, the same for commercial trash, loading and unloading docks, construction and demolition sites and the motorist and pedestrian. Such workshops tell about the littering norms or habits we have regardless of our good intentions. Even I find myself wanting to litter sometimes when I can't find a receptacle.

After each presentation, we ask the group, whether it be hotel maintenance workers or community group members, to comment on what they would like to do to end the sources of litter in their environment. You would be surprised to see how most people react to the workshop. Many have never thought of the sources of the litter problem, just blamed others. The workshop enables them to define their own needs. It is one step beyond the public information media campaign.

The media can help. Don't ever doubt their power to get out the word. Be sure they know what you are doing to publicize an event well in advance. The media can be your best friends...or your worst enemies. Keep them informed and they will work with you, not against you.

When mentioning continuous education, we cannot ignore our most challenging audience, the children, who will be the adults of tomorrow. Will they continue to litter, or will the Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute slogans and many more stay with them as adults? This is the fundamental question every city within the clean community system has to ask itself — can we reach the children? Their future is ours. The future that we study and plan for begins today. Such is the charge of the Kansas City Clean City Commission in regard to continuous education.

The fourth component is the ability to have effective code and ordinance enforcement. Although the Clean Community System considers this a last resort, it is very important. Like the case of the city vs. the slumlord corporation, residents of a city wanting a clean city can not be denied due process of law without some form of deterrent for the constant offender. Courts should not be used just as a means to punish the public with huge fines for infractions of the law. They should also be able to rule on requests of 'injunctive relief,' such as the judge ordering a violator to clean up his property within a certain period.

Even with fines and court orders, the sanitarian still finds his job more frustrating when the case is prolonged for another 30 to 60 days before the violation is abated.
I have two suggestions that we are looking into here in Kansas City which have been demonstrated successfully in other cities. Why not a litter ticket, much like a parking ticket, that fines the offender on the spot? This could be used by policemen who see a violator while en route. Do parking violators get a chance to move their car with a meter maid standing there ready to write a ticket? I am afraid not; they get the ticket.

My other suggestion is to set up a special Environmental Court and Litter Control Unit. The City of Indianapolis has recently created the first Environmental Court which will hear all cases stemming from violations of city codes pertaining to the environment, including those on weed, litter and junk control, air pollution, water pollution, health and safety, fire prevention and unsafe buildings. Such a court would free the prosecutor, as in our earlier example, to do strictly environmental work rather than share duties in several unrelated areas. Both ideas can work in Kansas City, and they can work in your city as well.

These ideas came from the tremendous freedom-of-information network exchange that cities within the Clean Community System have access to as much as they need. People learn from people. Cities, counties, and even states can learn from others.

The four components of the Clean Community System to change littering behavior have now been described. The city cannot do all these things alone, nor can any governmental unit given the fiscal restraints many are faced with today all around the country.

IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, any successful program, whether it be within the guidelines of the Clean Community System or any other system, needs to concentrate on results once the people are involved. The key accountability aspect, and accountability is a key word these days, is the method by which the clean community system evaluates itself. Using a scientific litter measurement technique approved by the American Public Works Association, called the Photometric Index, pictures are taken of randomly selected areas of the city to determine a baseline of measurement before the community effort begins. Once the programs on all four fronts begin, similar random areas are photographed to determine what change, if any, has taken place in the quantifiable amounts of litter. If there is a reduction, then the commission’s or committee’s efforts are paying off. Such methods of accountability clearly demonstrate to the funding source for the program that the money is being used effectively.

As you might wonder, cities participating in this system since 1974 have seen up to 70% reductions in litter since they took their baseline measurements. That is a substantial decrease in litter which makes this whole program worthwhile. Within the entire Clean Community System, results can be compared with other cities and more successful cities with successful programs can be used for assistance. Since the program began in Kansas City in April of 1977, we have seen a 12% reduction in litter since our baseline measurement was taken. Such a reduction is considerable since the program itself cost the city just under $22,000 and actually generated more than $50,000 in in-kind donations from the private sector.

Only through positive attempts to contain litter and encourage litter containment in everyday life can we hope to remedy the situation in our resource-scarce cities and counties. There is no written rule that says government must pick up after all mankind. Only through sharing the responsibility can we help keep our land clean and beautiful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT


Energy--A Vital Resource for the U.S. Food System

• Production agriculture uses 3% of the energy consumed by the U.S. Our total food system uses 16.5% of the nation’s energy.
• Fertilizer and pesticide manufacture represent over 1/3 of the energy used in production agriculture.
• About 89% of the energy invested in production agriculture is associated with crops; the remaining 11% is used for livestock production.
• Milk cooling and water heating account for at least 50% of the farmstead energy requirements on most dairy farms. New equipment and techniques developed by agricultural engineers can reduce the energy needed for heating water for milking operations by about 65%. Also, heat extracted from cooling milk can be recovered and used to heat water. These two factors combined with energy produced from biomass or solar panels can eliminate the need for purchased energy to heat water.
• American farmers could annually produce about 4 quads of energy from crop residue and more than 2 quads from manure while producing food for the nation and for export. (A quad equals 10^15 Btu or about 172 million barrels of oil. Total U.S. energy usage is about 77 quads per year.)
• Diesel tractors average about 38% higher horsepower-hr per gallon than comparable gasoline models (as of January, 1977). Diesel engines, however, have a higher unit cost because it costs more to manufacture them.
• In 1976, 93.2% of the 153,373 farm tractors sold by Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute member companies were diesel-powered. This compares to 89.6% in 1973 and 62.7% in 1969.

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