

# Philadelphia's City-wide Litter Index:

## Major Takeaways from 2017-2018

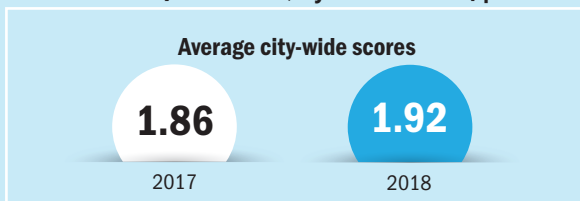
### What is the Litter Index?

Philadelphia's City-wide Litter Index is a map-based survey of the litter conditions on city streets, vacant lots, parks and recreation sites, riverways, transit stations, and other public spaces. Along with identifying what types of litter they see, City surveyors give a 1-4 litter score, with 1 being the cleanest and 4 being the most littered. With the data collected through these surveys, the City creates an indexed map of litter conditions across Philadelphia.

### What the Data Shows Us — Key Takeaways

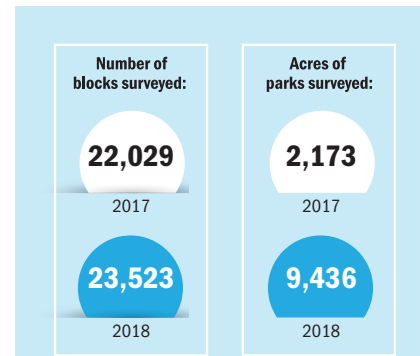
After completing the second year of City-wide Litter Index surveys in 2018, we compared the 2017 and 2018 data. Here are a few key takeaways:

#### 1. City-wide average Litter Index scores differed slightly between 2017 and 2018, by 0.06 on a 1-4 point scale.



Expanded surveying scope and better training as well as expected daily variation in litter conditions contribute to this change. Surveyors reached more blocks and more public parks in 2018, which in some cases meant including a moderately-to-heavily littered block or area that was not included in 2017. The best estimate of litter conditions across the city may not be the score in 2017 or 2018 on its own, but both scores together.

2. We surveyed more blocks and park areas in 2018. Parks and recreation sites included in the 2018 survey covered 10% of Philadelphia's land area. 293 parks and watershed areas were surveyed in 2017, and 648 were surveyed in 2018. Large parks were divided into smaller zones for the 2018 survey, and watershed parks were also included in the Litter Index for the first time in 2018. 22,029 blocks were surveyed in 2017, while 23,523 blocks were surveyed in 2018.



3. Most blocks that were moderately or heavily littered in 2017 scored better in 2018, while a majority of blocks that were minimally littered stayed the same. Over half the city's blocks received the same score in 2018 as they did in 2017. Of those blocks where the score changed, blocks scoring a 2 or 3 were more likely to have received a better score in 2018 and more than 90% of blocks scoring a 4 in 2017 received a better score in 2018. Meanwhile, about a third of blocks scoring a 1 in 2017 scored worse in 2018. A majority of minimally littered blocks (those scoring a 1) maintained their good scores, while a minority had a worse litter score in 2018 than in 2017.

4. In the 2018 survey, the most commonly reported types of litter were:



This shows the prevalence of single-use items like bottles, cans, takeout packaging, and plastic bags ending up as litter on Philadelphia's streets and in other public spaces.

5. The most commonly reported litter type on heavily littered blocks (those with scores of 3 or 4) in 2018 was construction debris. Construction debris was recorded on almost 60% of blocks that scored a 4. Overall, materials associated with illegal dumping (construction debris, trash bags with household waste, tires, mattresses, furniture, and car parts) were noted on over a third of all blocks surveyed (with any score) that had some kind of litter. This shows the importance of the City's efforts to take timely, coordinated action to tackle illegal dumping.

## Comparing the Litter Index with Other Datasets

### Litter Index Scores and 311 Requests

Comparing the concentration of illegal dumping requests submitted by residents via Philly311 with litter scores shows that in large areas of Center City and South Philly and in parts of University City and the River Wards, the number of illegal dumping requests is disproportionately higher than the degree of litteredness based on the Litter Index. Areas where relatively few requests are submitted but where litter scores are higher are areas of Southwest Philly, the Lower Northeast, and some sections of North Philly. More community outreach may be needed in these areas to encourage residents to report issues when they see them.

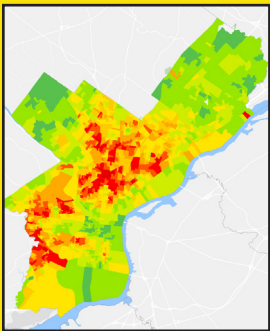
### Litter Index Scores and Park Friends Groups

Philly's parks are supported by a network of volunteer-based groups who organize as "Friends of" a park or recreation area. On average, parks with Friends groups have better litter scores (1.55 with Friends groups versus 1.7 without) and fewer parks with high litter loads. However, parks without Friends groups are disproportionately located in heavily littered neighborhoods. This shows the value of Friends groups in keeping parks and their surrounding neighborhoods clean.

## Search Your Score

### Visit [CleanPHL.org](https://www.CleanPHL.org) to

search your score and learn how to keep your neighborhood clean. If you search your address and find that your area does not have a resource (like a Block Captain, watershed group, or Park Friends group), you can learn how to get involved and bring that resource to your neighborhood.



## How is the data being used?

The Litter Index data is widely used by City departments as well as by Philadelphia residents, community groups, and academic partners. The data is being used for:

- Prioritizing neighborhoods for Neighborhood Litter Control Plans
- Analyzing litter conditions with trash can locations to optimize waste bin placement along commercial corridors through the Community Cans Program
- Helping residents learn about the resources available to help them keep neighborhoods clean
- Identifying sites for installing illegal dumping enforcement cameras
- Identifying neighborhoods for the City's pilot street cleaning program
- Identifying a neighborhood for the PhilaCan Program Pilot and testing the program
- Identifying heavily littered areas that have low requests for City cleanup services and proactively entering these areas
- Guiding site selection for Water Department and partner cleanups
- Evaluating Water Department maintenance and watershed protection programs to determine potential waterway dumping spots
- Identifying priority parks and recreation sites for installing updated illegal dumping signage
- Identifying priority parks and recreation sites for installing waste corrals and testing how well they work
- Evaluating parks and recreation recycling collections
- Evaluating the Commerce Department's Commercial Corridor Cleaning Program
- Monitoring SEPTA transit station litter conditions and identifying areas for cleaning improvements
- Supporting behavioral science experiments aimed at increasing recycling and reducing litter
- Helping local organizations and residents conduct their own litter indexing and analysis
- Providing a valuable dataset for academic studies
- Supporting Temple University's Peer Ambassador Program