

'Don't Trash Arizona' program credited for cleaner freeways

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The "Don't Trash Arizona" program has proven effective in reducing litter across highways in the region by half, state and local officials said Tuesday.

The Maricopa Association of Governments, which is composed of Valley municipalities and local tribal communities, joined with the Arizona Department of Transportation to conduct the program, which launched in 2006. Since then, according to new data collected by ADOT, highway litter has decreased in the region by about 50 percent.

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton, a member of the MAG Regional Council, said highway litter is something that can hinder the area's ability to lure events.

"We knew that litter on our roadway was not just impacting the quality of our life," Stanton said, "but it was also impacting our ability to get great tourism and business to come to our community."

Stanton said that in 2006, crews were collecting 130,000 bags of roadside trash, and collecting 1.6 million pounds of trash along Valley freeways. In 2016, those numbers decreased to 65,000 bags and 788,000 pounds of trash.

That occurred, he said, even as traffic volumes and miles traveled on the region's highways increased.

"We believe that reduction in litter is due in part to more people getting the message," Stanton said.

Stanton said that in 2006, 80 percent of residents believed that highway litter was a big or moderate problem. In 2016, that number decreased to 62 percent, which he said was testimony to the program working to clean up the highways.

"We want to continue this very positive trend so that we can continue to market our state as one of pristine beauty," Stanton said. "This is the most beautiful state in the United States of America, and 'Don't Trash Arizona' is a positive campaign to keep it that way."

Tempe Mayor Mark Mitchell, a member of MAG's Regional Council, said the program began in 2006 as a result of Proposition 400, a half-cent transportation sales tax approved by voters for the region that included funding for landscape maintenance, litter control and new litter-education campaigns, which were the focus of the "Don't Trash Arizona" program.



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Elected officials and tourism leaders spoke Tuesday morning at Tempe Diablo Stadium about the positive effects the "Don't Trash Arizona" campaign has made in the past 10 years.

Elected officials and tourism leaders presented the statistics at a press conference Tuesday morning at Tempe Diablo Stadium, spring training home of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. The stadium is located alongside Interstate 10, which according to Mitchell, "carries more than 300,000 cars every weekday."

Mitchell said eliminating freeway litter is one of the ways metro Phoenix can keep tourists and businesses coming back to Arizona, a point backed by tourism officials.

"It's very important to remember that first impressions really matter, so when visitors come to Arizona and they see a clean environment, it makes a big impact," said Kim Sabow, Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association president and CEO.

Officials stressed the impact that clean highways can have on the economy and tourism, providing figures that the Cactus League spring training season alone has an estimated \$545 million annual economic impact on the region.

"Tourism is the only industry to positively economically impact all 15 Arizona counties," Sabow said. "Tourism is the lifeblood for a lot of those counties."

Stephanie Dowling, deputy director of the Arizona Office of Tourism, said events such as Cactus League spring training, Super Bowls and the NCAA Final Four, which will be held in Glendale this year, allow the Valley's attributes to reach a global audience.