

10 Minutes For The Planet

#trashtag - The world grabs a binbag ©

by Sarah Heath and Catherine Balter-Kendall

Stressed syllables are underlined and in **bold**.*

Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

Who doesn't love a 'before' and 'after' photograph? Social media platforms **are awash** these last few weeks with **images** taken before a chosen area is cleared of **litter**, and after. **Technology** and the **environment** may not always **sit comfortably side-by-side** but this new trend may just **embrace** both.

The **brainchild** of Steven Reinhold back in 2015, the **idea came about** by accident. Reinhold was driving through California when a paper **receipt** flew out of the car window as he was driving along. Feeling such **guilt** at his **accidental** littering, Reinhold spent the rest of the journey picking up pieces of litter along his route. It was when he'd **collected** the 100th item off the side of the road that he had his **lightbulb moment** and the **hashtag** 'trashtag' was born. Reinhold said; "I wanted to see if I could make picking up trash seem cool!"

Some fans of the **challenge** spend five minutes clearing roadside litter whenever they make a rest stop on a journey. Families are **taking it upon themselves** to clear campsites while on holiday, school children are grouping together to de-litter their **neighbourhoods** and it's become a worldwide **phenomenon**: from Nepal to Brazil, Uzbekistan to Iran, **responsible** citizens who have been provoked into action by the sight of prolific and hideous debris **spread across** what could be a beautiful landscape, are arming themselves with wellington boots, rubber gloves, pitchforks and **bin liners** to help **rid** the planet of this **scourge**.



to be awash with (exp.) to contain large amounts of

litter (n.) trash, rubbish

to sit comfortably side by side (exp.) to coexist without conflict

to embrace (vb.) to support willingly and enthusiastically

brainchild (n.) invention

to come about (phrasal vb.) to happen

receipt (n.) ticket received as proof of something bought

guilt (n.) bad feeling after having done something wrong

lightbulb moment (exp.) moment of understanding

hashtag (n.) a sign to identify messages on a particular topic on twitter

to take it on oneself (exp.) to take responsibility for doing sth.

neighbourhood (n.) area, district

to spread across (phrasal vb.) to cover

bin liners (exp.) plastic bags to put rubbish in

The **baton was recently picked up** by an American man, Byron Ramon, who posted a before-and-after photograph of an area a man in Algeria had just spent **several** hours clearing of litter and **undergrowth**. His message reads, "Here is a new #challenge for all you bored teens. Take a photo of an area that needs some cleaning or **maintenance**, then take a photo after you have done something about it, and post it".

And there are many, many, many areas which need attention whether in people's home towns or bigger projects such as a nearby beach. To illustrate the **scale** of the **issue**, the overall picture shows that, globally, 1.2 trillion kilograms of **rubbish** is produced each year, of which each person contributes roughly one kilo per day.

Of that rubbish, 4.5 billion cigarette **butts** are thrown on the floor every year. Placing them end to end would create a distance **equivalent** to 117 return trips to the moon! Studies in the UK have shown that 99% of all roads have cigarette litter on them which contributes to the 30 million tonnes of litter collected from the British streets each year.

Fast food packaging makes up a massive **percentage** of litter **particularly** along motorways and major transport routes. It has been noted that people on the move, either in their cars or pedestrians, **take the number one spot** for littering. This **burden** is **compounded** by the fact that 40% of plastic produced is used just once before being **discarded**. Plastic bags can be **partially** included in this figure according to a study by the **Ocean** Conservancy: in the United States, **consumers** use almost one plastic bag per person per day. Danish citizens have limited their plastic bags to four per person....per year!

The **demographic** for litterers also shows that the main **culprits** are between the ages of 18-34. Even children show more respect for the environment! And men are much more likely to litter than women. And bizarrely, littering seems to be **contagious**! If an area is already covered with litter, people are more likely to drop other rubbish on the floor, the mentality being that if the place already **looks a mess**, what difference will another piece of rubbish make?

Companies must **take their share of the blame** too. Greenpeace with a partner **organisation**, the Break Free from Plastic movement, enlisted the help of thousands of volunteers to compile a list of global companies whose products contribute most to worldwide litter. The study, over a nine-month period covered six **continents**, 42

to rid (vb.) to remove, to eliminate

scourge (n.) thing that causes trouble

to pick up the baton (exp.) to accept the duty and responsibility

undergrowth (n.) a dense area of vegetation usually under trees

scale (n.) size

rubbish (n.) trash, waste

butt (n.) end, part of cigarette left unsmoked

to take the number one spot (exp.) to lead a list

burden (n.) load

to compound (vb.) to make sth. worse

to discard (vb.) to throw away

culprit (n.) people responsible for bad actions

to look a mess (exp.) to look untidy and badly kept

to take one's share of the blame (exp.) to accept the part of a problem which is one's responsibility

countries, 239 cleanup events and over 187,000 pieces of trash.

This **brand audit** showed that Coca-Cola, Danone, Nestlé and Unilever made it into the top ten of **companies** whose products make up worldwide trash.

And the cost of all this debris **strewn** across the planet? In Great Britain, the annual cost of cleaning the streets is £1 billion, a sum which could pay the salaries of an extra 33,000 nurses or fund 4,000 libraries. This is in **addition** to the £13 million paid out by the motorways agency, Network Rail and the Royal Parks. These sums are **dwarfed**, however, by the United States who **fork out** \$11.5 billion each year....just to clean up rubbish.

The **shot** taken and posted to Facebook by Byron Ramon has had over 100,000 likes and been shared over 300,000 times. While the challenge has gone global and people have posted their clear-up stories in **countless languages**, one word is constant and globally **understood**: #trashtag.

Litter is not only **ugly** to look at but research has shown that it has an impact on the mental health of those living locally to rubbish-strewn areas. Some **community goals** need no better **illustration** than a clear before-and-after image of what is possible when everyone works together to make the world a prettier, and subsequently happier, place. As one **enthusiastic** participant said: "it's the only **outdoors** we have".

Tune in next week for more stories on the environment, here on English Waves.

brand audit (exp.) critical examination of different companies' positions

to strew (vb. strewed, strewn) to spread over, to cover

to dwarf (vb.) to look small in comparison

to fork out (phrasal vb.) to pay for sth. often unwillingly

shot (n.) photo

countless (adj.) many

ugly (adj.) unattractive

goal (adj.) objective

outdoors (n.) outside, natural environment

***Tip!**

The following words are frequently mispronounced:

images (rhymes with bridges), **idea** (pronounced I dear), **recei(p)t** (the p is silent, **guilt** (pronounced like gilt, the u is silent), **scourge** (pronounce like urge the o is silent), **sev(e)ral** (the middle e is silent), **issue** (sounds like ishoo), **partially** (sounds like parshally), **ocean** (sounds like oshun), **companies** (The com is pronounced like the word come).