Littered

Dear Reader,

More and more people seem to be using car parks and motorway service areas as a cheap means of disposing of their household waste, and this was once again clearly apparent over the recent Easter travel period. In addition, coffee cups and burger wrappers carelessly thrown out of car windows pile up at the roadside or on motorway slip roads. Unfortunately, the illegal dumping of rubbish is becoming a popular pastime and a mass phenomenon. A “couldn’t care less” mentality is now prevalent. Or as one road maintenance worker on the German A8 autobahn near Sindelfingen put it: “Just open the window and chuck it out – that’s so cool.”

But for highway maintenance departments, it certainly is not “cool”. One simply cannot believe the things that they collect during annual cleaning operations, or even at regular intervals at the above-mentioned locations. They range from full nappies and bottles of urine that truck drivers have thrown out of the window to old furniture and builders’ waste. And they also have to dispose of tyres and scrap vehicles as well as bulky household rubbish, toxic fridges and old televisions. In the state of Hesse, according to transport minister Tarek Al-Wazir, collecting and disposing of 18,000 t of rubbish last year cost around two million euros and took 33,000 working hours. Time and money that would be better invested in improving worn-out bridges and roads.

But what is the reason for this phenomenon? Even at kindergarten and school, there are action days aimed at preventing the littering of the landscape. The children go into the countryside and collect litter. They discover just how difficult it is to clear the bushes and hedgerows of plastic straws and fast food wrappers. But as adults, they seem to have forgotten everything and are per-

fectly happy to let the highway maintenance departments and the taxpayer – in other words themselves – pick up the costs. One wonders whether these people do the same at home, and just throw their sweet wrappers behind the sofa in the living room. Not likely.

The German Alpine Club teaches people even at an early age to “take their litter home” when they leave the mountains. But this virtue seems to be dying out. Obviously, the only solution today is the threat of fines – which cannot be high enough if we really want to solve the problem.

Best regards,

Dipl.-Ing. Michael Reichenbach
Vice-Editor in Chief
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