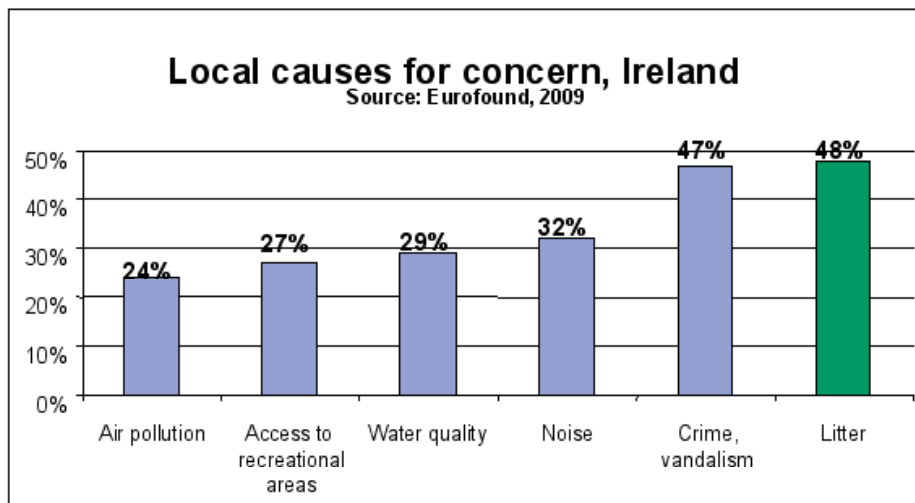


Litter “a greater concern than crime or pollution”, says EU study 60 towns under spotlight as 2009 IBAL Litter League expands

Despite a vast improvement in cleanliness levels across the country, Irish people still have more cause to complain about litter than about crime, water quality or pollution, according to a new EU study. The survey, by the EU Eurofound Institute*, came as Environment Minister John Gormley today launched an expanded IBAL Anti-Litter League for 2009.

Questioned as to which of 6 environmental factors gave rise to most cause for complaint in their locality, 48% of Irish people said litter, with 47% concerned about crime and violence. Noise (32%), water quality (29%), access to recreational areas (27%) and air pollution (24%) were lesser concerns. Citizens of 31 European countries in all were polled, with both litter and crime emerging as greater concerns in Ireland than in the majority of countries.



Commenting on the survey, Chairman of Irish Business Against Litter, Dr Tom Cavanagh, commented: “Clean streets are a commercial imperative in terms of protecting tourism, food exports and foreign investment. Being dirty is not an option. As this quality of life study shows, litter also has an important social dimension. Citizens have a right to live in a clean city or town and we see here how strongly they feel about that entitlement.

“The survey is not suggesting that litter is more important than crime, but that existing litter levels are a greater source of dissatisfaction to people than the levels of crime or pollution.”

It was back in 2002 that IBAL first commissioned An Taisce to survey litter levels in towns and cities and rank them according to international standards. This year sees the number of towns increased to 60. The first survey of 7 years ago showed only 2 towns deemed ‘litter free’. At the end of 2008 that number had risen to 36, or two-thirds of all towns.

The most prevalent forms of litter in 2008 were sweet wrappers, fast food wrappers, chewing gum and cigarette butts. Gum and graffiti are a particular focus of attention for IBAL, because of the high cost attached to their removal.

“The League has proven that the litter issue can be meaningfully addressed. Hopefully, 2009 will bring further improvement. Being recognised internationally as a clean country is an attainable goal with significant economic benefits.”

Among the new entrants to the League in 2009 are the tourist areas of Tramore, Buncrana and Shannon. IBAL is warning that any fall-off in local litter services would jeopardise Ireland’s standing as a ‘green’ tourist destination this summer. “We can ill afford to let our standards slip at a time when our tourism product is under such strain. Having litter-free streets at weekends is a vital part of this product.”

IBAL estimates the weekly cost of maintaining weekend cleaning in a mid-sized town at around €500.

IBAL member John Power, of the Irish Hotels Federation, added: "From a wide range of factors that might influence the choice of a holiday destination, the most important in choosing Ireland are friendliness, scenery, an unspoilt environment, and the range of natural attractions. The presence of litter undermines the positive impact of each of these deciding factors."

The other new towns in the 2009 programme are Ashbourne, Celbridge, New Ross, Newcastlewest, Tuam, Lucan, Blanchardstown and Ballincollig in Cork.

The first result of the 2009 Anti Litter League will be published in June. Howth was deemed cleanest town in Ireland in the 2008 programme.

-ENDS-

**For further information contact Claire or Dawn in Cullen Communications.
Tel 01 6689099/ 087 7819 375 / 087 215 6942 or dburke@cullencommunications.ie**

Editors note:

Set up in 1996, Irish Business Against Litter is an alliance of companies sharing a belief that continued economic prosperity - notably in the areas of tourism, food and direct foreign investment - is contingent on a clean, litter-free environment.

As part of the IBAL Anti-Litter League, An Taisce monitors all towns of population 6,000 and over independently in accordance with international grading standards.