

Changes to Connecticut's Littering Law

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Issues

Describe the history of Connecticut's litter law, highlighting the fine for littering and the last time the fine changed.

This report updates information in OLR Report [2002-R-0220](#).

Summary

Connecticut has had an anti-litter law since at least 1897, when people who threw nails, tacks, scrap iron and certain other debris on highways or streets could be fined \$20. The most recent change in the fine occurred during the 2023 legislative session when the legislature increased the fine from \$199 to \$500 ([PA 23-33](#), § 6, effective October 1, 2023).

The state littering law currently prohibits littering on public land or public property, in state waters, or on private property not owned by the litterer. Half of the above fine is payable to the state, with the other half payable to either the municipality or the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), depending on who made the arrest. In addition to the fine, someone convicted of littering on public lands must pay a 50% surcharge. The surcharge is payable to the municipality or DEEP based on who made the arrest ([CGS § 22a-250\(a\) & \(b\)](#)).

State law also authorizes municipalities to adopt an ordinance imposing a fine of up to \$1,000 for violating the state littering law and authorizing municipal police officers and other people to issue citations to enforce the ordinance. It allows municipalities with these ordinances to (1) adopt a citation hearing procedure to impose the fine and (2) assess an additional administrative penalty of up to \$500 after a hearing if the litter involves certain specified items ([CGS § 22a-226d](#)).

The law’s scope and its fine have changed many times since, as shown in the table below.

Connecticut Litter Law

The law prohibits people from throwing, scattering, spilling, placing, or causing to be blown, scattered, spilled, thrown, or placed, litter upon any public property or land, private property belonging to another, or any state waters. Littering does not occur if a person is authorized to dispose of waste on property the state or a municipality has designated for disposal ([CGS § 22a-250\(a\)](#)).

By law, litter is any discarded, used, or unconsumed substance or waste material, including bottles, cans, jars, and their detachable tops; unlit cigarettes, cigars, matches, or any flaming or glowing material; any garbage, trash, refuse, debris, rubbish, grass clippings or other lawn or garden waste, newspaper, magazines, glass, metal, plastic or paper containers, or other packaging or construction material; that has not been put in a litter receptacle ([CGS § 22a-248\(4\)](#)).

The below table shows a chronology of the state’s litter law, omitting acts making solely technical or conforming changes.

Table 1: Changes in Connecticut’s Litter Law

Year	Litter Is	Left on or At	Fine
1897	Nails, tacks, glass, crockery, scrap iron, wire	Highways, streets	Maximum of \$20
1955	Adds: trash, papers, and other offensive materials		Maximum of \$50
1959		Adds: state parks and beaches	
1963		Adds: state forests	Maximum of \$100 and up to 30 days in jail
1967			Increased fine to \$200
1969		Adds: lakes, ponds, boat launches and other public recreational facilities	
1974 (PA 74-262)		Adds: any public property or private property owned by another	Eliminated jail time and reduced penalty to \$10 for first offense and up to \$100 for subsequent offenses Court can order litterer to remove litter from where it was left

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Litter Is	Left on or At	Fine
1978 (PA 78-319)	<p>Adds: materials that may comprise litter (e.g., aluminum, glass, plastic, rubber, paper, or natural or synthetic material)</p> <p>Eliminated specific references to the following: abandoned vehicles, vehicle parts, furniture, oil, any nauseous or offensive matter, any object likely to injure a person or create a traffic hazard, anything else that is unsightly or unsanitary</p>		<p>Adds: court can order repeat offenders to pick up litter for between four and 12 hours for a second conviction and between eight and 35 hours for a third or subsequent conviction</p>
1985 (PA 85-446)			<p>Penalty changed to infraction*</p> <p>Eliminates other penalties</p>
1988 (PA 88-320)			<p>Penalty changed to maximum fine of \$250</p>
1992 (PA 92-249)			<p>Penalty changed to infraction*</p>
2001 (PA 01-204)			<p>Penalty changed to a maximum fine of \$199, with half going to the state and half to the enforcing municipality</p>
2005 (PA 05-234)		<p>Adds: any public land (state park, state forest, municipal park, or other publicly owned land that is open for active or passive recreation)</p>	<p>Requires (1) the municipal half of the fine to go to the arresting, rather than the enforcing, authority and (2) half of the fine to go to DEEP if the arresting authority is a DEEP-appointed conservation or special conservation officer or patrolman</p> <p>Adds: mandatory surcharge on those convicted of littering on public land that is 50% of the fine; surcharge goes to either municipality or DEEP, based on the arresting authority (see above)</p>

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Litter Is	Left on or At	Fine
2016 (PA 16-122)			Adds: authority for a municipality, after a hearing on a violation of a municipal littering ordinance, to assess an administrative penalty, in addition to the fine set in the ordinance, of up to \$500 for litter that includes furniture or items listed under the state's dumping law (CGS § 22a-250(d))
2023 (PA 23-33)			Increased maximum fine to \$500, effective October 1, 2023

**An infraction is punishable by a fine, usually set by a Superior Court judge, plus additional applicable fees and surcharges. An infraction is not a crime. Violators do not have criminal records and can pay the fine by mail.*

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