

The Litter and Community Appearance Index

Visually assessing litter is an essential part of developing a baseline of neighborhood streets and major corridors with the aim of achieving long-term, sustainable results. The Litter Index is conducted annually, at approximately the same time each year.

The Index is easy and flexible to meet your local needs. Notable conditions that indicate blight within the appearance of your neighborhood such as; abandoned cars, graffiti, illegal dumping, bulk household items, tires and miscellaneous posted signs may be added.

1. Locate a map with identifiable boundaries and clearly marked streets. Check your neighborhood Area Commission website for accurate boundaries or contact Keep Columbus Beautiful for assistance.
 2. Divide your neighborhood into manageable “areas.” This can include major corridors, main arteries and residential streets to score. We suggest selecting boundary and target streets that provide a *first perception* of your neighborhood. The streets should represent a sampling of the neighborhood demographics. **Both** clean and dirty streets should be selected.
 3. Set a date for the Litter Index. **Avoid:** Trash collection day and immediately following a cleanup. Train community members in the visible scoring system. **Note:** Training should occur on the same day that scoring takes place. Consider the weather conditions so you are conducting the Index when there is no snow or autumn leaves present to mask conditions.
- 3-6 individual scorers are recommended for an Index, this includes a scoring leader, and a driver that will *not* score.
 - Scorers will score the streets while riding in a vehicle. A large vehicle, like a van, is recommended.
 - Choose 10-12 blocks per area to score for **larger** neighborhoods-less 5-6 for **smaller** areas. For consistency in scoring, the blocks should be no more than ½ mile in length.
 - Scorers should be able to score each street in a few minutes and an area within 1-2 hours.

Litter Index Scoring System

The Litter Index uses a **four-point scoring scale** to estimate the presence of litter. The trained scorers will give each alley a score depending on the amount of litter observed as they drive along the street:

1. represents “Minimal or No Litter”
2. represents “Slightly Littered”
3. represents “Littered”
4. represents “Extremely Littered”

See detailed descriptions for each number in Exhibit 1

During the scoring of streets it is important that scorers all hear the same instructions and that the scorers all have a similar field of vision. A **designated driver** will take the scorers through each area and the **score leader** should ride in the front seat, using a prepared route to provide directions to the driver.

Begin by scoring a sample street.

- The leader will call out when the sample street starts, when the street/block ends, and ask scorers to record a score for the street.
- After viewing and scoring the sample street, scorers will compare the scores they assigned to the street.
- The idea is to develop a consensus among the scorers and the scoring leader as to what conditions represent each point of the four-point scale and may include discussion of when notes should be made in the “Notable Conditions” column of the score sheet.



Scoring Instructions

The following instructions apply during scoring:

1. The *scoring leader* will provide each scorer with a score sheet for each area (one score sheet per area).
2. The *scoring leader* will announce the street number.
3. The scoring leader will call “**start**” for each street to be scored. When the entire street has been viewed, the leader will call “**stop**.”
4. The *driver* should generally maintain a speed of about 5 miles per hour.
5. Scorers should look left and right to assess the overall street and alleys.
Consider the following:
How visible is the litter?
How continuous or frequent?
How difficult would it be to clean up the street?
6. When **stop** is called, each scorer will circle a **1, 2, 3, or 4** opposite the appropriate street number on the scoring sheet. Scorers should use **whole** numbers only.
7. During the scoring of a street, there should be *no discussion* among scorers.
8. Scorers may use the “**notable conditions**” column on the scoring sheet to indicate other appearance circumstances, like graffiti, illegal dumpsites, broken windows, or overgrown vegetation. This column can be used for listing positive or negative conditions that might guide a work plan to eradicate blight.
9. When all alley scoring is complete, the scoring leader will collect the score sheets and check to be sure all information is complete.
10. *When scoring is completed*, you average the street scores for each area to arrive at an area score, and then average all area scores to achieve a community score.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of scoring, the scorers and score leader should conduct a brief meeting. During this meeting, the scorers may share comments on their experience and explain any notable conditions observed. Record your observations using the questions below, so that the collected data may be useful in developing your plan.

- **Did you notice any trends or patterns?**
- **Brainstorm possible solutions to improve littered streets.**

Report the Litter Index results to Area Commissions, Civic Associations or Block Watches, and local elected officials.

Data Accumulation

The scorers provide a score for each street block within each area. This data will be used to develop the average score for each area by adding together all scores for each street and averaging for an area score. Area scores are then averaged to determine an overall score for the community. This can be done manually using the example below or by using a spread sheet.

Litter Index Example:

Area No. 1

Block	Scorer 1	Scorer 1	Scorer 3	Average
1	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	1	1.67
3	1	1	1	1
4	1	1	1	1
5	2	2	2	2
6	3	3	2	2.67
7	2	2	1	1.67
8	1	1	1	1
9	1	1	1	1
10	2	2	2	2
Area Average				1.60

Maintain Records

Clearly mark “Index, Do Not Destroy” on maps, score sheets, copies of report forms and other data. Place the date of the original Index scoring on the documents and plan to conduct the annual scoring at about the same time next year.


Exhibit 1: Litter Scale Descriptions

Score	Instructions for Scorer	Instructions for Scores
1 “Minimal or No Litter”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Virtually no litter• 1 or 2 small items• Generally neat and tidy	Virtually no litter can be observed. The scorer may see one or two small items in a city block, or equivalent. The entire block has a generally neat and tidy appearance.
2 “Slightly Littered”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Litter obvious• Eye is not continually grabbed by littered items	Litter is obvious, but the eye is not continually grabbed by littered items.
3 “Littered”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visible litter catches your eye frequently• Organized effort for removal• Considerable effort to clear	Visible litter catches your eye frequently throughout the block. An organized effort for removal is required with considerable effort to clean up the block/street.
4 “Extremely Littered”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuous amount of litter• Litter first thing noticed• Might include an illegal dump• Equipment may be required for removal• Strong impression of a lack of concern about litter	A continuous amount of litter is one of the first things noticed. Illegal dump sites might be observed. Equipment may be required to clean up. There is a strong impression of a lack of concern about litter in the area.

Exhibit 2: Litter Index Scoring Sheet


Group: _____ Area: _____ Date: _____ Scorer: _____

Street	Score	Notable Conditions
1	① ② ③ ④	
2	① ② ③ ④	
3	① ② ③ ④	
4	① ② ③ ④	
5	① ② ③ ④	
6	① ② ③ ④	
7	① ② ③ ④	
8	① ② ③ ④	
9	① ② ③ ④	
10	① ② ③ ④	
11	① ② ③ ④	
12	① ② ③ ④	
13	① ② ③ ④	
14	① ② ③ ④	
15	① ② ③ ④	



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The Litter and
Community
Appearance
Index

The Litter and Community Appearance Index is adapted from Keep America Beautiful, a national not-for profit organization of which Keep Columbus Beautiful is an affiliate member.