



Highway Maintenance Manual
Chapter 07 Roadside Management
Section 01 General
Subject 25 Adopt-A-Highway Program

Bureau of Highway Maintenance
July 2024

1.0 Authority

[Section 287.81 Wis. Stats.](#) prohibits the deposit of litter on or along highways of the state.

Wisconsin Administrative Code [Chapter Adm 2.06](#) includes handbills, literature, and promotional materials or devices in the definition of litter.

2.0 Background

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation initiated the Adopt-A-Highway (AAH) program in 1990 to allow groups to volunteer and directly support the state's anti-litter program. The purpose of the program is to help reduce and control litter along state trunk highways and create public awareness of the issue.

Many volunteer groups have adopted highway segments covering a large portion of the state's roadsides.

The program serves to:

- Reduce litter along highways.
- Build broad-based, active public support and environmental stewardship of the state's roadsides.
- Educate the traveling public about litter control.
- Enhance the environment and beautify roadways.
- Build positive public/agency relationships.

Due to safety concerns, the department does not adopt out Interstate highways and the [Corridors 2030](#) Backbone routes as defined by FDM 4.1 Introduction and Definitions, 5.1.1 Corridors 2030 Routes. The department uses the following considerations when identifying segments for adoption.

- Routes designated as backbone, but currently configured as a 2-lane highway. Once upgraded to multi-lane divided highway, the corridor may be removed from adoption availability.
- Highways with a traveling speed of 65 miles per hour or greater are excluded from adoption.
- Interchanges that are part of the urban mowing policy, HMM 07-05-40, or have a 5,000 or greater Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) on an interchange ramp. Traffic Counts can be found on [WisDOT Traffic Counts TCMAP](#).
- No medians, bridges, tunnels, overpasses, or around other structures that would pose a danger would be included in the adoptable segments.
- Segments that may have other limitations such as abundant growth of wild parsnip.

As of February 2024, a five-year sunset date is in place for existing segments that contain one of the listed adoption considerations and is not safe to adopt any longer. Such segments will be removed from availability. The department reserves the right to remove segments from availability as conditions change or to add segments if unique partnerships allow for adoption of routes.

Contact names and more information are found at the department's [Adopt-A-Highway program](#) website.

3.0 Adopt-A-Highway Group Responsibilities

Under the program, each qualified group of volunteers takes responsibility for litter control on a segment of state trunk highway. The group picks up litter on this segment at least three times per year between April 1 and November 1. Whenever possible, the AAH group should coordinate its litter control activities with the county mowing schedule so that litter is picked up before mowing occurs.

Litter, for this purpose, is defined as any object that should not be on the right of way. However, AAH groups should not pick up hazardous materials, large objects, or animal carcasses.

AAH groups do not work on divided highway medians, inside the middle of roundabouts or bridges, in tunnels, on overpasses, or around other structures dangerous for volunteers.

4.0 Department Responsibilities

The department issues permits to groups that have submitted applications to adopt sections of state highway right of way. Applications, clean-up reports, and segment abandonments are processed in an online form submission on the AAH website.

The department maintains the website and online active segments map for the AAH program. It furnishes safety guidelines, safety vests, a safety training video, trash bags, two “people working” traffic control signs and two acknowledgment signs displaying the name of the adopting group, one for each end of the AAH segment.

5.0 County Responsibilities

Upon notification of the completion of an AAH litter pickup cycle, counties are responsible for pick-up and proper disposal of trash bags left alongside the road by AAH groups.

The counties install state furnished AAH signs, posts and hardware at the beginning and end of each adopted highway segment.

Counties shall charge costs for sign installation and the collection and disposal of bags of litter to the appropriate Routine Maintenance Agreements (RMA) project ID numbers and the proper activity codes as outlined below.

- Collection and disposal of bags of litter should be charged to project ID 00xx-01-33 using activity code 042, for litter pickup.
- Signpost costs and installation should be charged to project ID 00xx-01-61 with activity code 081, Permanent sign repair.

County patrol staff are responsible for picking up litter on divided highway medians, center of roundabouts or bridges, in tunnels, on overpasses, or around other structures that would be dangerous for volunteers. The patrol staff time should be charged to the RMA litter pickup, activity code 042. See HMM 07-01-20, Litter Pick-up by Counties.

The AAH project ID number 0072-01-50 is for the purchase of AAH materials and supplies. Material and supplies include safety vests, trash bags, “people working” traffic control signs, brackets for “people working” signs, and the AAH acknowledgement signs. Counties are not permitted to charge their time to this project ID number.

6.0 Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials or waste are not to be moved. AAH groups and counties are not to move or transport hazardous materials. If suspected [clean up hazards](#), materials or waste are found by an AAH group, they are to document suspected hazards in the [cleanup report](#). If drugs, medical waste, or weapons are found the AAH group leader should contact local law enforcement’s non-emergency number. For more information on hazardous materials see the WDNR website on [proper management of hazardous waste in Wisconsin](#) and the WisDOT AAH website on [Safety](#).

7.0 Adopt-A-Highway Program Terms and Conditions

The Group agrees to the following:

1. The Group and its members are considered volunteers and not as officers, employees, or agents to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Any injuries, claims, liabilities, suits or costs arising from Group or Group members’ activities relating to this permit shall be the sole responsibility of the Group or its individual members.

2. The Group agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the Wisconsin Department of Transportation from any injury, cost, suit, liability, or award arising from the issuance or exercise of this permit, or because of any adverse effect upon any person or property attributed to the works of the Group.
3. Participants in the Group agree to obey and abide by all laws and regulations relating to safety and such terms and conditions as may be required by the department for special conditions that may exist on a particular adopted section.
4. The Group shall pick up litter a minimum of three times a year between April 1 and November 1.
5. The Group shall not work beyond its section limits.
6. The Group shall not pick up litter on medians, bridges, in tunnels, on overpasses or around other structures that would pose a danger.
7. The Group shall supply one adult supervisor for every 5 to 6 workers.
8. Each participant shall have reviewed the Adopt-A-Highway Safety Training Video before participation. The Group leader shall review the safety rules with all participants before proceeding to the highway segment.
9. All participants shall be at least 11 years of age or in the 6th grade on two lane highways and 16 years of age on four lane highways. No other persons shall be present at the work site.
10. The Group shall work only during daylight hours and in good weather.
11. Both traffic safety signs shall be displayed properly during litter pickup. Groups shall work on only one side of the road at a time.
12. When the Group encounters closed containers or items suspected to be hazardous, these items shall not be touched. Items of serious concern should be noted on the group's cleanup report.
13. All participants shall wear safety vests.
14. The Group shall place filled trash bags at the designated pickup site and shall recycle trash as required by the department.
15. The Group shall order required supplies and materials from the department.
16. Within 24 hours of a collection, the Group shall submit the online clean-up form.
17. Unused materials and supplies furnished by the department may be retained by the Group during the agreement period, but at the end of the period must be returned as instructed by the department. If the Group drops from the program, all materials must be returned to the department.
18. The Group shall not collect litter during the following holiday periods, Memorial Day extended weekend (Friday through Monday), July 3–5, and Labor Day extended weekend (Friday through Monday).
19. The Group shall make arrangements for off-road parking or shuttle bus type of travel to the worksite. All vehicles at the pickup site shall be parked at the nearest cross street, if possible, or at least 3 feet from the pavement when parking on the highway.
20. The Group may keep any recyclable materials.
21. Acknowledgment sponsor signs must abide by Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) Section 2H.08 Acknowledgment Signs. This includes no contact information, directions, slogans, emails, telephone numbers, text numbers, or internet addresses. As well, sponsoring organizations chosen sign name must comply with State laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, religion, color, age, sex, national origin, and other applicable laws. WisDOT reserves the right to work with the sponsors in revising group names or acronyms that

may be offensive to the public. Sign names are not allowed to be phrases for gaining political influence.

22. The Group shall notify the department of abandonment of their segment. This permit is valid until such time the Group notifies the department of abandonment.

The Department agrees to, as follows:

1. Provide safety vests, trash bags, traffic safety signs and a safety training video.
2. Remove the filled trash bags as soon as possible after the pickup.
3. The department reserves the right to refuse or work with the sponsors in revising group names or acronyms of group names when preparing signs.