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## The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

### **Adopt-a-Highway**

Adopt-a-Highway programs are active in 48 States, Puerto Rico, New Zealand, and 6 Canadian Provinces (Oklahoma Department of Transportation 1999).

A 1999 National Survey by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation found that

- 962,502 volunteers are picking up litter in 48 states (which represents a 12.5% drop from 1.1 million volunteers reported in 1997);
- 88,919 groups belong to AAH in 48 states (4.1% more than reported in 1997);
- annual cost of picking up roadside litter totaled \$106,833,568 for the 33 reporting states which is 6.3% (or \$7.2 million) less than was reported in 1997.

Texas, Wyoming, Ohio, Illinois and Florida require volunteers groups to adopt at least a 2 mile stretch of road, pick-up litter at least 4 times a year, and shall agree to a two-year commitment to the program (Texas Department of Transportation, Wyoming Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, Ohio Department of Transportation, and Florida Department of Transportation). In Maine, municipalities are responsible for implementing programs, and are liable for all aspects of the program. Municipalities may require minimal adoption of at least 1 mile for 2 years, and no interstate or controlled access roadways are eligible for adoption (Maine Department of Transportation).

### **Signage**

Blue and white are the required colors for 18 state's signs. The next most popular required colors for AAH signs are green and white, used in 7 states. Logos on AAH signs are allowed in 3 states, CA, MS, WA and in New York City. The dimensions of signs advertising AAH sponsors vary widely from state to state (Oklahoma Department of Transportation 1999), some examples include

- CO= 3' x 1.5'
- CT= 1.5' x 2.5'
- MA= 3' x 3'
- NH= 2.5' x 2.5'
- NY= 2.5' x 5'
- WY= 8' x 5' (Interstate sign) 4' x 3' (Primary & Secondary road signs)

### **Safety for Adopt-a-Highway Volunteers**

Each state sets independent safety guidelines for their volunteers including an age requirement for participation. General safety rules include carpooling to the work site, working during daylight hours only in good weather and clear visibility, and avoiding peak travel times (Maine Department of

Transportation, Florida Department of Transportation, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, and Arizona Department of Transportation).

Forty states' Departments of Transportation supply volunteers with safety training, orange safety vests, temporary roadwork warning signs and plastic trash bags. In addition these states pick-up bagged litter from the work sites (Oklahoma Department of Transportation 1999).

Eight states—CA, GA, MI, MN, NC, PA, TX, and WA—reported serious injuries or deaths involving AAH volunteers (four deaths and 5 injuries were reported). These incidents included the death of a child in Texas who had been left sleeping, woke up and was killed attempting to cross the road and the death of a 12 year old child in Pennsylvania who left the AAH area and was hit by a car (Oklahoma Department of Transportation 1999).

### **Who is allowed to Adopt-a-Highway?**

States' policies on who can adopt a highway vary. While 9 states (AL, AR, CA, GA, KS, MD, OH, TX, WV) have rejected applications from the KKK, 24 states have never denied an application. Florida has refused a hate group. Kansas has refused an individual person. Missouri has a highway adoption under review (by the KKK). Oklahoma has refused groups younger than 11 years old and candidates for political office. South Carolina has refused groups that do not meet guidelines in their policy. And, Utah refused a Meat is Murder group and an elementary school (Oklahoma Department of Transportation 1999). In 2001 the South Dakota Department of Transportation denied the Sioux Empire Gay and Lesbian Coalition application to Adopt-a-Highway (De Leon, Lionel, 2001).

### **Cost Savings**

Because the available information on cost savings from Adopt-a-Highway Programs is from the websites produced by these programs, the figures are particularly supportive of high cost savings.

According to the Virginia Department of Transportation the value or financial impact of an Adopt-a-Highway Program is determined by multiplying the annual number of volunteer hours by the typical hourly rate for an average maintenance crewmember. In Virginia, the volunteer hours totaled 320,000 at a rate of \$8.75 per hour equaling a savings of \$2.8 million which represents a five-fold return on the cost of running the program (The Virginia Department of Transportation). This figure, however, does not account for any administrative or oversight costs incurred during the implementation of the Adopt-a-Highway Program.

The New York Department of Transportation reports that the Adopt-a-Highway Program saves the state roughly \$100 to 200 dollars per mile. There are over 5,000 miles of highway currently adopted and therefore, the state saves approximately \$50,000 to 100,000 dollars as a result of the Adopt-a-Highway Program (Email correspondence with Mike Clarke from the New York Department of Transportation). The North Carolina Adopt-a-Highway Program claims to save taxpayers more than \$5 million annually in roadside cleanup costs. The North Carolina AAH is one of the largest in the nation, with approximately 6,000 groups and 150,000 volunteers participating. They have adopted 12,000 miles of highway throughout the state. Again, it is important to note that these figures do not necessarily account for the administrative and oversight costs required to run an Adopt-a-Highway Program.

## Sources

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