

RMS INSTA-POLL**“How many covers do you throw away in a typical month***[January — 74 responding]*

0 - 29
 2 - 3
 5 - 5
 6 - 4
 8 - 2
 9 - 1
 10 - 3
 11 - 1
 12 - 7
 15 - 2
 18 - 2
 20 - 1
 25 - 2
 30 - 1
 35+ - 1
 40 - 1
 45 - 1
 50 - 2
 55 - 1
 60 - 1
 100 - 4

Well, the most frequent response was certainly “0”, with 29 respondents saying that they normally don’t throw *any* covers away during a typical month. But, that means that most collectors *do*. Some 63% of the survey’s participants said they toss between 2-100 covers a months—damaged, Nationals, and the like.

If I take the number of collectors currently in the hobby x 63% x the average number of covers thrown out a month, as shown here, I get 984 x 63% x 47 covers monthly, which comes out to 29,136 monthly, or 349,632 covers thrown away annually. That’s over a third of a *million* covers destroyed by *collectors* every year! Granted, that’s a really rough estimate, but it does give us a ballpark figure, and that’s enough for discussion purposes, at least.

There will be two schools of thought here, of course. One will be horrified that so many covers are being intentionally destroyed, and even more so by *collectors* doing the destroying, while the other will celebrate that the ‘garbage’ is being culled out of the collectible material. One will argue that there *is* no ‘garbage’, since one man’s garbage is another’s treasure. The other will return that “Oh, yes there is!” and that the inclusion of such demeans and devalues collections and the hobby in general, not to mention having to sort through that material over and over again on freebie tables and the like in order to get to the useable stuff.

It’s an age-old controversy, never to be solved, simply because of differing personalities and perceptions. Personally, I’m one of the collectors who *does* throw out such covers, and I lean towards the view that the hobby and its members are better off without them. At the same time (while not purposely trying to straddle the fence), I have to admit that I’ve often found covers I could use among other’s discards. Although, even that needs to be clarified. There’s a huge difference between *struck* covers and *damaged* covers. No one in this survey said that they threw out struck covers, and my ‘finds’ on freebie tables have never included damaged material.

Of course, as with most things, there are various factors which can make the end figure go up or down. In the 1980s, for example, when there were some 4,000 collectors in the hobby, the number of covers being discarded was certainly higher than it is now. And, the more covers a collector goes through, the more he’s likely to toss.

Additionally, the figure here is relative. The hobby’s one third of a million covers discarded annually is only a drop in the bucket when compared to what the nation in general must toss away each year.

Notable comments from this survey’s participants:

-I never throw covers away!

-I may throw away 10-20 covers a month...and if I leave any laying low/on the floor, our puppy chews a few also.

-I do not throw away any covers unless they are badly damaged.

-I never throw away covers, I save them for freebie tables. Someone else may treasure them.

-I think this questions really depends on how active a person is on a daily/weekly/monthly basis. I do know I have hundreds, probably thousands that are bound for the trash or some similar fate.