

The Truth about Tobacco Litter



The biggest litter problem. Cigarettes are the most littered item in the United States and the world.¹

Several trillion cigarette butts/filters are littered worldwide every year. That's billions of cigarettes flicked, one at a time, on sidewalks, beaches, nature trails, gardens, and other public places every single day adding up to 1.7 billion pounds of litter.²

Cigarette filters are made of PLASTIC. About 96% of cigarette filters are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic that can persist in the environment as long as other forms of plastic.²

Slow decomposition. A single cigarette filter can take 5-10 years to decompose.³ After a cigarette finally decomposes, it remains chemically present in the environment. Chemicals such as hydrogen, cyanide, and arsenic leak into nearby waterways and environments.⁴

Cleaning up the shorelines. The International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) is an annual worldwide effort to clean up litter on beaches, lakes, and streams. Here is what they have found:

- In the 2005 ICC cleanup, enough cigarette filters were picked up that, if stacked end-to-end, they would go to the moon and back...twice!³
- Right here in Illinois for the ICC's 2005 cleanup, 44.3% of collected debris consisted of smoking related products in the form of cigarette and cigar butts, filters, and tobacco packaging.³
- In September of 2006, volunteers collected 5,654 butts from Chicago's North Avenue Beach in three hours.⁵



Children and wildlife can mistake cigarette filters for food. When ingested, the toxins in the cigarettes can cause nausea, vomiting, and other symptoms in children. Filter ingestion has also been known to cause death in many animals.³ In 2003, the United Nations International Maritime Organization reported that cigarette litter adversely affected 177 species of marine animals and 111 species of seabirds through ingestion.⁶

Littered cigarettes can start fires. These fires can cause massive amounts of damage and cost billions of dollars to the public. Nationally, annual human and property costs of fires caused by careless smoking total about \$6 billion.³

¹ CigaretteLitter.org

² American Littoral Society

³ Clean Virginia Waterways Project

⁴ Ocean Conservancy – International Coastal Cleanup

⁵ "How the butts stack up" Chicago Tribune, 6/18/2008

⁶ "Protecting Nonsmokers but Taking a Toll on the Environment?" The Environmental Magazine

For more information, contact Tobacco Free Lake County at 847-377-8090 or TFLC@lakecountyil.gov

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