

# Cigarette Butt Litter Prevention Tips

Source: [Clean Virginia Waterways](#)

Businesses, colleges, parks, and communities across the world struggle with the #1 litter problem—cigarette litter. As more and more indoor smoking bans force smokers outside, the problem may grow. Here is a list of some of the solutions that have been tried:

[Click here for newspaper articles](#) about how communities are trying to reduce cigarette litter.

## 1. Pick it up.

Litter can be picked up by volunteers or by paid employees. Hiring people to pick up smoking-related litter can cost a business, park, or school a great deal of money. According to the Philadelphia Daily News (March 27, 2000) Penn State estimates that its landscapers spend 10 hours a week picking up discarded cigarettes at an estimated cost of \$150,000. Some businesses also have their employees pick up litter from parking lots, entrances, and landscaped areas. "Adopt a Spot," "Adopt a Park" and other adoption programs involve volunteers in cleaning certain areas. Some schools encourage student groups to Adopt a Spot on campus which they clean at least twice a year. Cleanups are also organized by nonprofit groups, including the [International Coastal Cleanup](#), an annual worldwide event organized by The Ocean Conservancy. Some states, including Virginia, have prisoners pick up litter along highways.

## 2. Education—educate smokers & nonsmokers about the need to dispose of waste properly.

Studies show that smoking-related litter can be decreased by 50 percent or more through educational campaigns. Signs, messages printed on packaging, personal messages to smokers, and presentations about the harmful impacts of cigarette litter will decrease some littering behavior. However, like any public education campaign, the educational message must be continual. A one-time educational effort will not result in long-term changes in behavior. If smokers and nonsmokers knew that cigarette butts contain toxins, and they cost us millions of dollars in fire-fighting and cleanup, we as a society would not tolerate this littering behavior.

## 3. Have a "no smoking" policy or allow smoking only in designated areas.

More and more public beaches, parks, open-air shopping malls, and college campus are trying to concentrate cigarette butt litter by requiring smokers to use only designated areas. These areas should have ash receptacles, lighting, seating, and be convenient. Often the use of these designated smoking areas are promoted for public health reasons (secondhand smoke) and fire prevention, as well as a litter-control mechanism. This approach is sometimes attacked because it restricts smokers' rights (after all, smoking is a legal activity), and it is trying to address one behavior (littering) by restricting another behavior (smoking).

## 4. Provide ash receptacles at all entry/exit points of buildings, at bus stops, and other areas where people frequently need to discard their cigarettes.

According to Keep America Beautiful, which is conducting a scientific study on cigarette littering behavior, these "Transition Points" are the places smokers need to discard their cigarettes before entering buildings or getting on a bus. Once installed, these receptacles need to be monitored and

maintained regularly; once smokers become accustomed to using these receptacles you may need to add more to keep up with the cigarette waste being properly discarded. Studies show that more ashtrays help, but just a little.

## **5. Distribute pocket ashtrays.**

Many types of pocket ashtrays are on the market. Some are made of foil and are disposable, while others are made of plastics or metals, and can be used for years. These can be purchased in bulk and distributed by community groups or businesses as part of a litter-prevention campaign.

## **6. Enforce litter laws.**

Cigarette butts are litter, yet rarely do smokers get ticketed for littering. The law enforcement solution to litter is difficult, however, as many taxpayers would like to see law enforcement personnel spend their time on more meaningful work.

## **Other ideas:**

### **Engaging Tobacco Manufacturers**

Cigarette butts in the environment is a litter issue-not a smoking issue. Just as the manufacturers of sodas have no control over the consumer's disposal of empty cans or bottles, cigarette manufacturers cannot control smoker's behavior when it comes to the disposal of cigarette butts. Just as beverage manufacturers contribute to anti-litter campaigns, and have invested in public education on litter issues, so too should the tobacco industry. Thus far, cigarette manufacturers have made small efforts at anti-litter education. They need to take an active and responsible role in educating smokers about this issue and devote resources to the cleanup of cigarette litter. Strategies can include anti-litter messages on all packaging and advertisements, distribution of small, free portable ashtrays, and placement and maintenance of outdoor ashtrays in areas where smokers gather. Maybe cigarette packages can be redesigned to accommodate discarded butts.

### **Anti-Litter Taxes**

In some states, consumers pay a small "anti-litter tax" every time they purchase a canned or bottled beverage. These funds support anti-litter efforts. A similar tax on cigarette purchases would go a long way towards funding campaigns aimed at eliminating the littering of butts. Picking up littered cigarette butts costs schools, businesses, and park agencies money. By taxing smokers for anti-litter educational efforts, some of the costs of cleaning up cigarette butts will shift onto smokers.

### **Read all about cigarette butt litter!**

[Click here to read an article](#) that was published in the August 2000 issue of the American Littoral Society journal, *The Underwater Naturalist*. This article, by CVW's Executive Director Kathleen M. Register, includes background data, such as the fact that 2.1 billion pounds of cigarette filters were discarded worldwide in 1998, along with results of her research showing that leached chemicals from cigarette filters are deadly to the water flea *Daphnia magna*, a small crustacean at the lower end of, but important to the aquatic food chain.

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### **Students and Teachers:**

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