

Cigarettes Butt Litter—Why So Many?

Source: [Clean Virginia Waterways](#)

Why so we see so many cigarette butts on the ground? (or, why do some people litter?)

Cigarette butts accumulate in the environment due to:

1. The popularity of plastic cigarette filters
2. The habit some smokers have to "toss their butt" rather than use ashtrays
3. Bans on indoor smoking

1. The popularity of plastic cigarette filters

Prior to 1954, most cigarettes were nonfiltered. In the mid-1950s, sales of filtered cigarettes increased dramatically as the cause-effect relationship between smoking and cancer became reported extensively in the press. Before these reports, in 1950, sales of filtered cigarettes in the U.S. were 1.5% of all cigarette sales. Now, more than 97% of cigarettes sold in the US have filters. Click here for more information about the [number of cigarettes consumed in the U.S.](#)

2. The habit some smokers have to "toss their butt" rather than use ashtrays

People who wouldn't think of littering with something large, such as a bottle or box of trash, often believe that it is OK to litter a cigarette butt. Why is this? Why do some people litter? Coming soon: a summary from several research projects that asked the question "WHY DO SOME PEOPLE LITTER?"

3. Bans on indoor smoking

The [recent bans on indoor smoking](#) in the US, Canada, European nations, and in Asia have also appeared to cause a shift in cigarette butt deposition. Circumstantial evidence indicates that more cigarette butts are accumulating outside of buildings due to the popularity of indoor smoking bans. In Australia, cigarette butts account for 50% of all litter, a trend that the executive director of Keep Australia Clean blames partly on indoor no-smoking policies. Ireland is also seeing more cigarette litter due to its ban on indoor smoking. [Click here for newspaper articles](#) about how communities find cigarette litter increases when smoking is banned inside. [Click here for more on workplace smoking bans](#), and how they impact cigarette litter in the environment.

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.

Students and Teachers:

Are you interested in doing a science fair project on cigarette litter? [Click here for ideas and information.](#)

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