



# Cigarette Butts

Cigarette butts contain hazardous chemicals such as cadmium, arsenic and lead that are partially filtered out during smoking. But when the butt is discarded, these chemicals leach into the environment contaminating our waterways and land.<sup>2</sup>

## The problem

### Cigarette butts and the environment

Since the first national Clean Up Australia Day in 1990, cigarette butts have consistently been one of the most common items found by Clean Up volunteers.

While most people are aware of the health risks involved in smoking, few seem to realise that cigarettes are also bad for the environment. Approximately 7.2 billion cigarettes are littered in Australia each year.<sup>3</sup>

Cigarette butts have become one of our most important litter issues.

Not only do littered butts seriously reduce the aesthetic quality of any environment, but they can cause a great deal of harm.

If a butt is simply dropped, it can smoulder for up to 3 hours. Cigarette smoke contains up to 4,000 chemicals so each second the butt is left alight, dangerous toxins are released into the environment.

Flicked butts can cause fires. When thrown from a motor vehicle into dried grass butts can start a grassfire or even a bushfire.

### What are butts made of?

Cigarette filters or butts are made from fibrous material designed to trap tar and other toxic chemicals before they reach the smoker's lungs. The filters are made from cellulose acetate and are coated with paper.

Each butt contains the remnants of tobacco, paper and a filter. The residue in the butts contains toxic, soluble chemicals. These chemicals are deadly and add to the existing cocktail of environmental pollution.

### The impact of cigarette butts on marine life

When it rains, cigarette butts lying in our streets and gutters are carried via stormwater directly into our harbours, beaches and rivers. The chemicals contained in these butts and the butts themselves impact on our water quality and can be deadly to marine life.<sup>1</sup>

Stormwater is not treated so all litter and cigarette butts carried by stormwater are dumped directly into these waterways. In fact, 95% of the litter on beaches comes from suburban streets through the stormwater system.

Cigarette butts can take up to 12 months to break down in freshwater and up to 5 years to break down in seawater. Birds and aquatic animals can mistake the butts as food, resulting in serious digestive problems that may lead to death. Butts have been found in the stomachs of young birds, sea turtles and other marine creatures.<sup>1</sup>

Another serious concern is that toxic chemicals such as lead and cadmium, which are trapped in the cigarette filter, can leach out in water. Within just one hour of contact with water, the chemicals begin to leach into the aquatic environment and threaten the wellbeing of marine life.





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## The solution

### So what can I do?

Always dispose of cigarette butts responsibly. You can do this by using a Go Green Pocket Ashtray. The small, green ashtray fits easily into a pocket or handbag. The ashtrays are fire resistant and re-usable and can be purchased from any Coles or Bi-Lo supermarket.

Alternatively, you can reuse empty film canisters. Just drop the butt in, seal the airtight lid and shake the container. Don't grind the butt onto the plastic as it may melt.

Businesses and other organisations looking for permanent cigarette butt litter solutions can contact BUTTsOUT8 for a range of products.

You can also help to educate those around you such as friends, family and co-workers about the impacts of littering cigarette butts and encourage them not to litter.

And don't forget littering cigarette butts is not just harming our environment but can also mean hard fines for you.

### Fines for cigarette litter 4

Cause	Fine
Cigarette packet	\$60
Unlit/extinguished cigarettes	\$60
Lit cigarettes in dangerous circumstances e.g. in dry bush:	
individuals	\$375
corporations	\$750
Cigarette item littered from a motor vehicle:	
individuals	\$200
corporations	\$400
Lit cigarette not covered by points above	\$200

### Did you know?

- Cigarette butts take up to 5 years to break down. 1
- A cigarette butt can smoulder for up to three hours causing a grass fire or even a bushfire.
- Over 4,500 fires a year are caused by cigarettes and smokers' materials.
- Cigarette smoke contains up to 4,000 chemicals.
- An estimated 100,000 tonnes of polluted air is exhaled by smokers in NSW each year. 4
- In some parts of Australia, if caught littering cigarette butts you can receive a fine of up to \$2,000 if the matter goes to court.4

### References

1 EcoRecycle  
www.ecorecycle.vic.gov.au

2 Keep Australia Beautiful – Victoria www.kabv.org.au

3 Butt Littering Trust  
www.buttlitteringtrust.org

4 NSW EPA 2009

