

CIGARETTE LITTER

Cigarette litter is the number one littered item in the country, present on over 70% of sites across England. In addition to the visual impact on local environments, each cigarette butt contains a range of toxins that cumulatively present a health risk to wildlife.

What does Keep Britain Tidy want to achieve?

Keep Britain Tidy wants to see cigarette littering substantially reduced by 2020 and all but eradicated by 2030.

What will Keep Britain Tidy do?

Keep Britain Tidy will organise and lead a smoking litter forum comprising the tobacco industry, DCLG, the LGA and the ESA. Working together, the forum will develop effective solutions to cigarette littering.

Keep Britain Tidy will work with Defra to develop an effective smoking litter campaign, aimed at challenging smokers' attitudes and raising awareness.

Keep Britain Tidy will work with Local Authorities and bin manufacturers to research, develop and roll out effective solutions to smoking litter.

How can other organisations help?

Government

We want government (DCLG and Defra) to develop policy introducing the concept of extended producer responsibility for the Tobacco industry, requiring the industry to bear the cost of smoking litter interventions and prevention campaigns.

Cigarette Industry

We want the Tobacco Manufacturers Association and its members to engage actively in the development and funding of

schemes and campaigns aimed at preventing smoking litter, in particular supporting the collection and recycling of smokers litter, together with the development of well-designed and effective portable containers for cigarette butts.

Local Authorities

When investing in new bin stock, we want all Local Authorities to consider procuring dedicated smoking litter bins or general litter bins with secure and separate compartments for smoking litter.

We want all Local Authorities to ensure that Fixed Penalty Notices are issued for littering of cigarette butts and smoking materials.

We want all Local Authorities to identify smoking litter 'hot-spots' and roll out designated smoking zones in these areas, with adequate bin provision.

Background to the issue of cigarette litter

Current estimates suggest around 6 trillion cigarettes are sold each year. It is estimated that by 2025, this figure will rise to nine trillion cigarettes worldwide every year, two thirds of which are littered.

19% of adults in the UK smoke, with a slightly higher proportion of men than women. This is down from a high of 46% in 1974, when the data series began (this figure was probably even higher prior to 1974).

It remains the leading cause of deaths in the UK, and the most effective method of preventing smoking litter is to stop smoking.

In this respect, we need to ensure that any campaigns aimed at encouraging smokers to dispose of their waste responsibly, does not tacitly encourage or support smoking.

Whilst packaging and matches make up some of the litter, the vast majority are cigarette filters or 'butts'. The filters were introduced as a means of reducing exposure to tar and became prevalent through the 1960s as awareness of the links between cancer and smoking became more prevalent.

However, the filters also create a waste product which not only smells but is also toxic.

The filters are made up of cellulose acetate fibres which absorb nicotine and tar. They do not readily biodegrade and estimates suggest they can remain in the environment for up to 15 years.

In terms of impact on wildlife, studies demonstrate that toxins leach out of the used filters and in one study, a single cigarette butt soaked in a litre of water for 96 hours leached enough toxins to kill 50% of the fish exposed to them.

Why do people litter their cigarette waste?

Studies on smokers attitudes to littering offer conflicting opinions with some claiming that most smokers are simply not aware that they are littering when disposing of cigarette butts, as it has become such an ingrained and to them, social accepted habit.

Other studies claim that smokers do recognise that they are littering, but feel they are entitled due to a lack of adequate facilities such as smoking bins.

The cumulative consequence of littering may not be perceived by smokers. Littering one cigarette butt can appear trivial, and they may not recognise their contribution to the trillions littered annually.

Additionally, used cigarette butts smell and not unreasonably are not pleasant to carry. Whilst personal cigarette butt pouches are available, they are not widely taken up by smokers, who perceive they may both smell and create a fire hazard when carried in a pocket.

In addition, the ban on smoking in enclosed spaces which was introduced in 2007, has resulted in smokers congregating outside offices, pubs, clubs and transport hubs. Where smoking litter would normally be collected indoors within ashtrays, the ban has led to a rise in smoking litter on our streets and in particular in hot-spots outside these premises.