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The Fight is Not Over: The Tobacco Industry Harms California's Environment and Communities

Pollution from tobacco products causes disproportionate health and environmental burdens in communities of color and other demographics targeted by the tobacco industry. Decades of intentional and aggressive tobacco industry marketing in communities of color has led to higher retailer density, leading to more tobacco litter in these communities. Cigarette filters continue to be the #1 trash item found on beaches and roadsides, representing 34% of the total trash items collected in California. Cigarette "filters" were originally developed as an industry marketing ploy, and in fact cigarettes more dangerous by allowing for easier inhaling, encouraging more frequent puffing, and giving consumers a false sense that by using these products they are reducing their health risks. Tobacco Industry campaigns such as the Keep America Beautiful campaign promote the idea that consumers are responsible for tobacco litter, shifting blame from the industry to consumers and preventing meaningful policy change.^{1,7}



Tobacco Industry toxic waste creates a threat to human health and the environment.

- California agencies spend over \$41 million each year on tobacco waste cleanup from roadsides.²
- Large California cities spend between \$7.1 million (San Francisco) and \$19.7 million (Los Angeles) per year on tobacco waste cleanup.³
- Over 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are littered each year. Cigarette filters are made from a non-biodegradable plastic called cellulose acetate.^{4,10}
- Cigarette filters and e-cigarettes have been linked to costly, destructive structural fires and wildfires which threaten both wildlife and communities.⁵
- Fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in e-cigarettes have become so prolific that insurance costs for hazardous waste facilities have skyrocketed, the cost of which is passed down to households.⁶
- Many e-cigarette manufacturers simply direct users to hazardous waste/electronic waste disposal companies, which often don't accept e-cigarettes because they are difficult to recycle.⁷

- An average of 1 in 20 house fires are caused by tobacco use. These incidents are often deadly, resulting in an average of 560 deaths every year.⁸

Cigarette filters may release toxic chemicals such as nicotine, formaldehyde, acetone, benzene into the environment as well as heavy metals including arsenic, lead and cadmium.^{9 10 11}

- 813,925 pounds of toxic chemicals were released from U.S. tobacco facilities in 2018.¹²

The Tobacco Industry contributes to high deforestation. Approximately 600 million trees are chopped every year by the industry. It takes 13 million acres to produce the world's tobacco supply, which is about 17 times the size of Yosemite National Park.¹²

- Tobacco litter accumulates at high schools in different proportions based on the socio-economic demographics of the students.¹³

Children, pets, and wildlife are poisoned by ingesting discarded cigarette butts and nicotine-containing e-liquid.¹⁴

- Toxic chemicals in tobacco waste threaten our precious aquatic ecosystems and are toxic to freshwater and saltwater organisms.¹⁰

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