



2026 | CAPITOL INFORMATION & EDUCATION DAYS



Truth and Health: Protecting Our Environment from Commercial Tobacco & Nicotine Harms

Tobacco product waste (TPW) such as cigarette butts and packaging, are an environmental, economic, and health concern for communities.¹ Despite the best efforts of local government, volunteer groups, and private entities to conduct cleanups, tobacco waste ends up on the streets, sidewalks, beaches, parks, and parking lots where it is transported to marine environments via storm drains and streams. It is estimated that TPW costs \$265 million collectively in the 30 largest cities in the United States.² The tobacco industry should be held responsible by shifting accountability for costs to communities and public agencies to the industry.



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

- Tobacco product waste (TPW) such as cigarette butts, e-cigarette components, packaging materials, are an environmental, economic, and health concern for communities.^(1,2)
- In 2020, it was estimated that TPW costs \$265 million collectively in the 30 largest cities in the United States.⁽³⁾
- California agencies spend over \$41 million each year on tobacco waste cleanup from roadsides.⁽⁴⁾
- Large California cities spend between \$7.1 million (San Francisco) and \$19.7 million (Los Angeles) per year on tobacco waste cleanup.⁽⁵⁾
- Cigarette butts continue to be the #1 trash item found on beaches and roadsides, representing 34% of the total trash items collected in California. Over 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are littered each year and are made from a nonbiodegradable single-use plastic called cellulose acetate.^(6,7)

- The global weight of discarded cigarette butts is roughly 680,000 metric tonnes.⁽³⁾
- Single-use plastic can have a range of secondary costs to human health, the environment, and economy that can be hard to quantify, such as ingestion of single-use plastics by marine life and the economic impacts of marine litter on tourism.⁽³⁾
- Cigarette butts and e-cigarettes have also been linked to costly, destructive structural fires and wildfires which threaten both wildlife and communities.^(8,9) According to the EPA, vape batteries pose one of the greatest fire risks to the waste system.^(10, 11)
- Fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in e-cigarettes have increased as the popularity of e-cigarette use has increased. This increase, along with other lithium-ion battery products, have become so prolific that insurance costs for hazardous waste facilities have skyrocketed, the cost of which is passed down to households.^(10, 11)

- Cigarette butts may release toxic chemicals such as nicotine, formaldehyde, acetone, benzene into the environment as well as heavy metals including arsenic, lead and cadmium.^(1,12)
- Toxic chemicals in tobacco waste threaten our precious aquatic ecosystems and are toxic to freshwater and saltwater organisms. Children, pets, and wildlife are poisoned by ingesting discarded cigarette butts and nicotine-containing e-liquid.⁽¹⁾
- 636,690 pounds of tobacco waste was released by tobacco facilities in the US in 2022.⁽¹³⁾
- The Tobacco Industry contributes to high deforestation. Approximately 600 million trees are cut down every year by the industry. Every year, approximately 200,000 hectares of land are cleared for tobacco agriculture and curing, which is equivalent to about two-thirds of Yosemite National Park.^(10,14)
- The tobacco industry harms the global climate. It is estimated that the tobacco industry emits 0.2% of all global greenhouse gas emissions.⁽¹⁵⁾
- Cigarette butts are a concerning source of microfiber pollution in our environment. One cigarette butt contains over 10,000 microfibers and can release 63-144 microfibers within just 10 days of breakdown.⁽¹⁶⁾

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