

Cigarette Litter Prevention Programme

July 2010, Keep Bermuda Beautiful will launch its campaign to provide solutions to smoking-related litter. The Bermuda Roadside Litter Survey taken in 2009 revealed that cigarette butts are the biggest form of litter. If you include lighters, matches and cigarette packaging along with cigarette butts this accounts for 25% of Bermuda's litter.

Cigarette butts may seem small but the toxic chemicals they contain make them hazardous. Cigarette butts are made from plastic and are not biodegradable. There is an estimated 4.5 trillion butts littered worldwide every year. When butts are discarded on the streets they can be swept down storm drains which lead to the ocean. The toxic chemicals that they contain leach out into the aquatic ecosystem and threaten the quality of the water and marine life. Birds and fish mistake cigarette butts for food. The discarded butts contain tar, arsenic, lead and other hazardous chemicals.

What are butts made of?

Cigarette filters 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 plastic (cellulose acetate). Each butt contains the remnants of tobacco, paper and a filter. The plastic filters are not biodegradable. After long periods of time, the filter will break down into smaller and smaller pieces but the plastic particles never completely go away and the toxins leach into the ground or surrounding water.

What is the environmental impact of discarded butts?

Cigarette butts have become the most littered item in Bermuda and the world. The problem has increased due to ordinances that prohibit smoking in buildings, businesses, restaurants and bars. Lack of outdoor ash receptacles is also a contributing factor. Many smokers are not aware that cigarette butts are a form of litter. So lack of ash receptacles, lack of awareness and new laws prohibiting indoor smoking have all contributed to an increase in cigarette butt litter.

Areas with a high number of littered cigarette butts look dirty and uncared for, which attracts more littering of other trash. 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.

What is the impact on marine life?

Many people don't realize that when it rains, water flowing through our streets, down our drains and through our stormwater pipes ends up in the ocean. Stormwater is not treated so all litter and cigarette butts carried by stormwater are dumped directly into the ocean. This litter reduces water quality and potentially harms our precious marine life. Cigarette butts can take up to 5 years to break down in seawater, and even then the plastic particles never completely go away. 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. Another serious concern is that toxic chemicals such as tar, arsenic, lead and cadmium, which are trapped in the cigarette filter, will leach out into the 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.

So what can I do?

Always dispose of cigarette butts responsibly. You can do this by using a POCKET ASHTRAY. These small personal ashtrays fit easily into a pocket or purse. They are fire resistant, re-usable, odorless and snap shut. KBB will be distributing 5,000 KBB-branded pocket ashtrays during their campaign. Contact KBB on 295-5142 or kbb@northrock.bm. Businesses and other organizations within the City of Hamilton looking for CIGARETTE ASH RECEPTACLES for permanent cigarette butt litter solutions can contact Mr. Richardson at City Hall. 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