

Tobacco Free Outdoors - Key Messages and Facts



Tobacco litter is poisonous and puts children, pets and wildlife at risk. Our playgrounds, parks and beaches should not be used as ash trays.

Exposure to secondhand smoke in outdoor recreational areas can be hazardous. Outdoor recreational areas should be places that people can breathe fresh air and exercise smoke free.

Tobacco free policies reduce secondhand smoke exposure and eliminate cigarette butts so families can enjoy outdoor activities in a healthy environment.

Support for tobacco free policies is growing. Currently over 280 municipalities in New York State have passed regulations restricting tobacco use in outdoor recreational areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter.¹
- Nearly all cigarette butts are made up of plastic like cellulose acetate fibers and can take decades to decompose.²
- At beach cleanups, cigarette butts are the most common form of trash found.³
- Within an hour of contact with water, cigarette butts can begin leaching chemicals such as cadmium, lead and arsenic into the marine environment. Cigarette butts have been found in the stomachs of fish, whales, birds and other marine animals, leading to ingestion of hazardous chemicals and digestive blockages.⁴
- Cigarette butts not properly extinguished can cause fires.
- Clean up of tobacco litter from recreational areas is costly to taxpayers.

HEALTH IMPACT

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has classified secondhand smoke as a Class A Carcinogen placing it in the same category as radon, benzene, and asbestos.⁵
- Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 substances, over 40 of which are known to cause cancer in humans and many of which are strong irritants.⁶
- The Surgeon General has declared that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke.⁷

- Small amounts of secondhand smoke can trigger allergies, asthma attacks and other breathing problems.⁸
- Because their lungs are smaller, children breathe in 50% more air pollution than an adult. They are more susceptible to the dangers associated with tobacco smoke even if outdoors.⁹
- A person sitting or standing next to a smoker outdoors can breathe in wisps of smoke that are many times more concentrated than normal background air pollution levels.¹⁰
- Stepping on cigarette butts can result in burns.

IMPACT ON YOUTH

Discarded cigarette butts contain the tars absorbed by the filter and levels of bacteria from smoker's mouths and lungs, thus posing a health hazard to small children who routinely tend to pick up items off the ground and place them in their mouths.

American Poison Control Centers reported that over 5,400 children were poisoned by the ingestion of cigarette butts in 2008.¹¹

Tobacco use in family-friendly places such as playgrounds, parks and athletic events models unhealthy behavior and normalizes the use of tobacco. When children see adults smoking, they see smoking as acceptable.

^{1,2} www.cigarettelitter.org

³ www.oceanconservancy.org

⁴ www.kabv.org.au

^{5,6,8,9} U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - www.epa.gov

⁷ U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. "The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General: 6 Major Conclusions of the Surgeon General." Office on Smoking and Health, 2006

¹⁰ <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2007/may9/smoking-050907.html>

¹¹ American Poison Control - www.aapcc.org/dnn/Portals/0/2008annualreport.pdf