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Butts on seats - Margaret Court Arena could be Australia's ash tray

There's No More Butts - Australian charity takes aim at Australia's smallest, biggest litter problem

Melbourne, AUSTRALIA, 17 February 2021:

Think your ash tray fills up quickly? Based on Australian estimates of litter and waste, an ash tray the size of Margaret Court Arena would be full of cigarette butts in less than two years.

8 billion cigarette butts are littered into the Australian environment annually¹. If all of these were retrieved and stored in a venue the size of Margaret Court Arena, it would take less than five years to completely fill this 7,500 seat venue with 39 billion butts².

As littered butts are estimated to be only one third of the total amount consumed by Australian smokers each year, the redirection of the 24 billion annually consumed cigarette butts would fill a Margaret Court Arena-sized ash tray within approximately 20 months.

A cigarette butt can take up to 15 years³ to break down and, whether in the natural environment or in landfill, they can cause significant damage to our planet. They leach toxic chemicals, such as arsenic and lead, into the environment. As the filters break down, microplastics are created, which can have a devastating effect on soil and marine life, with lab tests confirming fatal impacts to fish from a single cigarette butt in one litre of water⁴. Although littering fines are high in some Australian states, it is seemingly hard to enforce, so the littering behaviour continues in Australia and around the world.

Made from a fibrous plastic (known as cellulose acetate), cigarette butts can be recycled, with successful programs already operating overseas. There are at least three methods to recycle cigarette butt filters to create new products, such as bricks, benches and packaging.

No More Butts Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Shannon Mead, believes we should introduce a Product Stewardship Scheme to ensure collaboration across the tobacco industry and all levels of government to tackle this long-standing issue. A formal scheme could direct research into environmentally-friendly filter materials, packaging changes, national litter awareness campaigns, as well as the standardisation of terminology and infrastructure and the introduction of recycling programs.

Shannon Mead, CEO, No More Butts, says:

“This isn't about smoking, it's about littering. We want people to be aware that they're throwing a non-biodegradable plastic onto the ground. Despite the item being small, the problem is big, with 8 billion butts thrown on the ground each year in Australia.

The recent introduction of the Recycling and Waste Reduction Act and related Product Stewardship Rules provide the perfect opportunity for the government to identify cigarette butts as a waste plastic, enabling a focus from State governments and access to Recycling Modernisation Funds.

Landfill re-direction to enable scaled recycling solutions, using a variety of innovative methods, will create employment opportunities and the ability to manufacture new materials for various industries, such as construction and packaging.”

Roderic Byrnes, Executive Chair, No Butts About It Australia, says:

“This is a rare opportunity. Although we are a young charity, we carry with us an energy and a passion like no other. Based on the support we have received to date, creating a more sustainable world - one ciggy butt at a time - is more than achievable.”



Image of the inside of Margaret Court Arena, 2017. All rights held by the original owner⁵

For further information please contact No More Butt's media team:

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About No More Butts

No More Butts is taking action on the single biggest contributor to litter in Australia and around the world - cigarette butts. Made from cellulose acetate, cigarette butts are not biodegradable and leach harsh chemicals into the natural environment. It has been reported to take 15 years for a cigarette butt to break down in seawater, causing damage to marine life and has the ability to enter the food chain as a microplastic. Cigarettes are also considered to be a major contributor towards fires.

Based in Queensland, Australia, No More Butts is the brand and a registered business name of No Butts About It (International) Ltd, a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission. It holds a Deductible Gift Recipient status, having been entered onto the Register of Environmental Organisations in 2020.

<https://nomorebutts.org.au>

References

1. 8 billion is reported in: "Plastic revolution to reality", published in July 2020 by WWF
2. This takes assumptions of capacity vs MCG, as reported here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-20/surveyors-find-exact-measurements-of-melbourne-cricket-ground/6709520>
3. 15 years has been reported recently in: "Plastic revolution to reality", published in July 2020 by WWF
4. <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2019/08/cigarette-butts-are-toxic-plastic-pollution-should-they-be>
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