



Cigarette Butts

Cigarette butts contain hazardous chemicals such as nicotine, cadmium, arsenic and lead, which can leach into the environment from a discarded butt.⁸

The problem

What are butts made of?

People commonly mistake the butts for cotton wool; however they are made of cellulose acetate (plastic).

- Chemicals leach from cigarette butts within one hour of contact with water³
- As the acetate (plastic) filters decompose they release these toxic chemicals²

Cigarette filters or butts 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 cellulose acetate and are coated with paper.

Each butt contains the remnants of tobacco, paper and a filter. The residue in the butts contains toxic, soluble chemicals. These chemicals are deadly and add to the existing cocktail of environmental pollution.

Cigarette butts and the environment

Cigarette butts have become one of our most important litter issues. Since the first national Clean Up Australia Day in 1990, cigarette butts have consistently been one of the most common items found by Clean Up volunteers.

While most people are aware of the health risks involved in smoking, few seem to realise that cigarettes are also bad for the environment. Approximately 7 billion cigarettes are littered in Australia each year³

Not only do littered butts seriously reduce the aesthetic quality of any environment, but they can cause a great deal of harm.



The acetate (plastic) filters can take many years to decompose. Smokers may not realize that their actions have such a lasting, negative impact on the environment.

Discarded cigarette butts have serious effects on the environment. Cigarette filters are made of plastic and are not readily biodegradable, taking up to 12 months to break down in freshwater and up to 5 years in seawater.⁷

- Littered butts have environmental impacts on waterways, soils and habitats.
- Littered butts release toxic emissions (e.g. nicotine and pyrene leach within one hour of exposure) into water and soil as they decompose.
- Butts can have negative effects on habitats when ingested by wildlife and as contributors to ecological degradation²

Flicked butts can cause fires. When thrown from a motor vehicle into dried grass butts can start a grassfire or even a bushfire.

Did You Know

- NSW EPA mentioned as many as 1959 fires each year are attributed to cigarettes.³
- The chemicals that leach from cigarette butts are toxic to small crustaceans (cladocerans) and bacteria.⁵
- This toxic concentration occurs with just one cigarette butt per 40 litres and this toxicity persists for at least seven days²
- Cigarette butts can take up to 12 months to breakdown in freshwater, and 5 years in seawater.⁷





Cigarette Butts

The solution

So what can I do?

Always dispose of cigarette butts responsibly. You can do this by using a Pocket Ashtray. There are a number of small, ashtray that fit easily into a pocket or handbag.

These ashtrays are fire resistant and re-usable and can be purchased from retail outlets nationally.

Alternatively, you can reuse empty plastic pill bottles. Just drop the butt in, seal the airtight lid and shake the container. Don't grind the butt onto the plastic as it may melt.

Businesses and other organisations looking for permanent cigarette butt litter solutions can contact eg: [ButtOutAustralia](http://ButtOutAustralia.com.au) for a range of products.

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.



And don't forget littering cigarette butts is not just harming our environment but can also mean hard fines for you.

NSW Fines for cigarette litter⁴

Cause	Fine
Cigarette butt	\$80
General Littering	\$250
Lit cigarettes in dangerous circumstances e.g. in dry bush: individuals	\$450
corporations	\$900
Cigarette item littered from a motor vehicle: individuals	\$250
corporations	\$500
lighting a fire during a Total Fire Ban	\$2200

Obviously the best thing you could do to reduce the impact of cigarette butts in our environment is not to smoke. However if you do smoke, make sure that your butts go into the bin rather than on the ground.

Small butt bins are available from eg: [nobutts](http://nobutts.com.au) - [personal ashtrays](http://nobutts.com.au) for when you're places without a bin. Interested people could even grab a handful and store some at their workplace for others to access.

Did you know?

- Cigarette butts take up to 5 years to break down⁷
- Cigarette smoke contains up to 4,000 chemicals.⁶
- In some parts of Australia, if caught littering cigarette butts you can receive a fine of up to \$2,200 if the matter goes to court⁴
- Approximately 7 billion cigarettes are discarded in Australia each year.³
- How to report a litter bug for your state at nobutts.com.au

References

- 1 [Keep Australia Beautiful website](http://KeepAustraliaBeautiful.com.au)
- 2 [Victoria Litter Action Alliance Litter Prevention Kit – Cigarette Butts](http://VictoriaLitterActionAlliance.org.au)
- 3 [NSW Environment Protection Authority NSW Litter Prevention Kit](http://NSWEnvironmentProtectionAuthority.gov.au)
- 4 [NSW Fines for Cigarette Litter](http://NSWFinesforCigaretteLitter.com.au)
- 5 [Cigarette Butt Litter](http://CigaretteButtLitter.com.au)
- 6 [National Center for Biotechnology Information \(NCBI\)](http://NationalCenterforBiotechnologyInformation.gov)
- 7 [EPA Victoria Report litter](http://EPAVictoria.gov.au)
- 8 [NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage](http://NSWandOfficeofEnvironmentandHeritage.gov.au)

