

# Cigarette butts – a blight on Scotland's streets

Your guide to cigarette butt litter



# Introduction to cigarette butts – a blight on Scotland's streets

**Walk through any town or city in Scotland and, chances are, you're never far from a discarded cigarette butt.**

This all adds up to a litter problem that's dirty, unsightly and riddled with harmful chemicals. It's also a problem that burns through the public pocket, as Scotland's local authorities fight to clean up our streets, only to see them littered again.

Whichever way you look at it, cigarette waste is costing us all a packet.

## **What's this guide about?**

Tackling cigarette litter isn't a straightforward task – but it is possible. This guide will help you understand the problem, learn from others, and find resources to help you communicate with businesses and individuals about the negative effects of not binning our butts.

Smoking-related litter generally includes packaging: cardboard boxes, foil and plastic wrapping. These cause litter too. But cigarette butts – because of the sheer numbers dropped, the time they take to degrade and the toxic materials they contain – are a special case. So that's what we'll focus on here.



# What's the problem?

No two ways about it – cigarette butts left on the ground are litter. And there's a serious double standard at play. Many smokers wouldn't dream of dropping any other type of rubbish, but somehow see dropping cigarette ends as perfectly acceptable.



When asked, smokers often say that putting cigarette ends or cigar tips in a public bin poses a fire hazard, or that carrying them around is unreasonably dirty and smelly.

Some even say they believe a drain is an acceptable alternative to a bin – which it isn't. Or that dropping cigarette butts is fine because they're biodegradable – which they're not. In fact, these little menaces take up to 12 years to fully break down, leaching out unpleasant chemicals while they're at it.

What about smokers who realise dropping cigarette ends is the wrong thing to do? Some of them argue that dealing with disposal is someone else's job. Which is why local authority cleaning teams have to spend their days fishing cigarette ends out of awkward spaces – from tree grates to gravel pits.



## OK, so whose problem is it?

Obviously, each litterer is responsible for making sure their smoking-related rubbish ends up in the bin. Catch them shirking this duty, and you can impose a fine.

Otherwise, it becomes a burden for landowners. And if that landowner happens to be a local authority, the Scottish taxpayer has to pick up the bill. This point is crucial – because once businesses, employers and individuals realise the full financial and non-financial impacts of cigarette litter, we'll stand a chance of stemming the tide.



### The problem in numbers

What's the size of the problem we're dealing with?

Since the smoking ban forced Scotland's smokers outside, cigarette litter has become more visible on our streets. But lack of awareness, lack of ashtrays – and perhaps other reasons too – are making the problem worse still.

The figures show the scale of the situation:

- Around **half of Scotland's streets are affected by smoking-related litter** (butts, matches and packaging).
- In our towns and cities, this figure **rises to almost 75%**.
- Every day, UK smokers throw away about **200 million butts**.
- Cigarettes account for over **40 percent of street litter**.
- **120 tonnes of cigarette-related rubbish** are discarded on Britain's streets every day.



#### IN-DEPTH

### Other impacts

There are also other impacts that the numbers don't reflect. For example, cigarette butts leak toxins into our rivers and seas. Cigarette filters have also been found in the stomachs of creatures who mistake them for food, including fish, birds and whales.

#### IN-DEPTH

**1/2**

**of Scotland's streets are affected by smoking-related litter**

**rises to almost**

**75%**

**in towns & cities**

# Lessons from across the pond

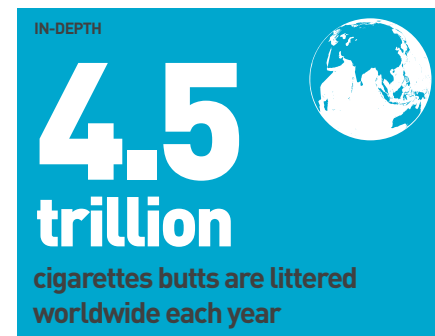


Don't be fooled into thinking Scotland is the only country fighting the blight of discarded cigarette ends. Worldwide, around 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are littered each year. A sobering thought.

So what's everyone else doing about it?

In 2009, Keep America Beautiful researched cigarette litter in the States. Among other things, they found that:

- **Littered cigarette butts** - are mostly dropped on the ground. Dropping them into bushes or shrubbery or on or around waste bins is also common, as is littering into planters.
- **Making cigarette bins available** - either stand-alone or integrated into a litter bin - leads to lower rates of cigarette butt littering.
- **Smokers are more likely to litter** - if there's already litter around - that's any litter, not just cigarette butts.
- **Younger adult smokers** - are more likely to litter cigarette butts than their older counterparts.



## IN-DEPTH

### Understanding the issue

Once they understood the problem, they created a specific plan to address it. This included:

- Increasing the availability of public ashtrays
- Promoting the use of portable ashtrays
- Cleaning-up public spaces to deter litterers

- Motivating the public with messages about individual responsibilities and obligations

These are measures we can adopt with relative ease in Scotland - and there's plenty already being done here too.





# Get kitted out

Here are some tips for getting the ball rolling in your area.

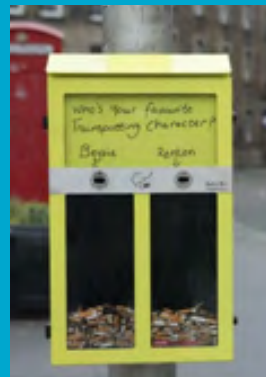


## IN-DEPTH

### Get kitted out

#### Ashtrays

Having enough ashtrays is the first step in encouraging smokers to bin their cigarettes responsibly. Wall-mounted. Free-standing. Integrated – there's a range of styles available to fit different locations.



#### Ballot bin butt boxes

Installed as part of Edinburgh's Neat Streets project showed that adding a novel twist can help attract attention to your litter prevention efforts.



#### Portable ashtrays

Portable ashtrays make for a great giveaway, so smokers are never left stuck with a butt and no bin to put it in.



#### Give them a sign

It may sound basic, but reminding people to dispose of their cigarette responsibly really works. Simple signs near ashtrays and benches are often enough of a nudge to change behaviour.

#### Get creative

Ever seen a white van with 'wash me' scrawled on the back? Believe it or not, this same technique – clean graffiti – can be used to discourage smokers from dropping their cigarette butts. Simply power-wash a stencil to a dirty surface. The message is reproduced with zero damage to the environment.



# Get your message out there

**Cigarette butt littering won't go away on its own. Communicating the cost of clearing up and the damage cigarette butts can cause to our environment will help change hearts and minds.**

There's a wealth of information and ideas on the Zero Waste Scotland website, including the targeted messaging toolkit which contains free artwork you can adapt for your audiences.

## **Cigarette litter campaign support**

We've prepared two short articles about cigarette litter that come complete with visual support. You can use these in newsletters and other communications with residents. There are also tweets and a cigarette butt infographic you can use on your own site and use on social media.

---

# Get your message out there

