

# Cigarettes and the Environment

By: Lauren Radano, MA  
REBEL Youth Coordinator

# General Info

- ◆ Cigarette butts are the most littered item in America and the world
- ◆ It is estimated that several TRILLION cigarette butts are littered every year
- ◆ The paper and tobacco part of a cigarette are biodegradable
- ◆ Cigarette filters are made up of cellulose acetate (a form of plastic) and are NOT biodegradable. They take DECADES to degrade

# Tobacco Manufacturing

- ◆ In 1995 worldwide tobacco manufacturing produced 2.26 billion kilograms of solid waste and 209 million kilograms of chemical waste
- ◆ Nicotine requires special disposal because it is a toxin
- ◆ Tobacco industry is moving manufacturing to developing countries, without guidance from government agencies like the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency)

# Cigarette Butts on the Beach




- Rain and wind carry the butts into the water supply, where the toxic chemicals the cigarette filter was designed to trap leak out into aquatic ecosystems, threatening the quality of the water and many aquatic lifeforms
- Cigarette filters have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures who mistake them for food

# Cigarette Butts on the Beach

- Ingestion of more than 1 cigarette or 3 cigarette butts can cause health problems in a toddler such as gagging and vomiting.
- Butts may be small, but added together, they ruin the beauty of the beach

# Cigarette Butts and the Rainforest

- ◆ Toxic chemicals can leak out and kill small animals
  - ◆ Hundreds of major fires are started every year by matches and cigarette butts disposed of in the woods
  - ◆ Major loss of trees and land
  - ◆ Forest fires destroy habitats for animals
  - ◆ Economic costs of fires, loss of visitors
- 
- A decorative graphic at the bottom right of the slide, consisting of a silhouette of a mountain range in various shades of teal and blue.

# Cigarette Butts and Humans

- ◆ Careless smoking is estimated to be the number one cause of fire related death and injury in the nation
- ◆ According to the National Fire Protection Association, cigarette-caused fires result in more than 1,000 civilian deaths, 3,000 critical injuries (many among firefighters), and \$400 million in direct property damage each year

# Cigarette Butts and Humans

- ◆ In January 2001, a motorist driving along Interstate 8 in San Diego County flicked a cigarette butt onto the center median, sparking a fire that eventually burned more than 10,000 acres, destroyed 16 homes and charred 64 vehicles
- ◆ In 1999, a lorry driver in France threw a butt from the cab window. The smoldering cigarette ignited a fire inside the Mont Blanc tunnel that killed 39 people.
- ◆ On September 18, 2002, a wildfire in California that scorched 247 acres on the base Monday afternoon was started by a cigarette butt tossed by a passing motorist, fire investigators said.

# What Can You Do?

- ◆ Educate peers and family members! The next time you see someone dispose of a cigarette improperly, politely remind them to place their cigarette in an ashtray.
- ◆ If no ashtray is around (like when on the beach), try using film containers, metal mint containers, regular tin foil, or anything else that's handy until you can properly dispose of the cigarette butt.
- ◆ Write letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines expressing your views
- ◆ Write letters to local government, law enforcement, and fire safety officials asking them to take a more active role in the issue. Just about every community has an ordinance prohibiting litter, including cigarettes. Unfortunately, these ordinances are not enforced as often as they could be.
- ◆ Participate in beach, park, and environmental clean-ups!

For more information....

Please visit [www.cigarettelitter.org](http://www.cigarettelitter.org)

Thank you!

A stylized silhouette of a mountain range in shades of teal, located at the bottom right of the slide.