

Montclair Times

The Montclair Times Editorial: "Butt out: No puffing in public parks"

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Cigarettes are appallingly bad for people. There is an irrefutable link between lung cancer and tobacco inhalation. Smoking is linked to other cancers in the mouth, tongue, and throat. Many smokers get lung diseases that shorten their lives and often cause other diseases and respiratory ailments.

For some people, however, cigarettes provide relief. We exist in a stress-filled time. People work hard, often for little pay. Basic expenses are high, medical costs abhorrently so. The cost of paying for prescription de-stressing drugs can increase a user's stress. Expensive though they are, thanks to the deservedly high federal tax, cigarettes help assuage the everyday stress and tension experienced by many smokers. Whether in traffic congestion or experiencing post-argument emotions, lighting up abates the anxiety.

But many of these same motorists and pedestrians toss lit cigarettes onto the ground, prompting fires that will kill people, pets, and wild animals, and destroy residents' lifelong possessions. Because of the many health problems caused by cigarette smoking, and the exposure to these health problems linked to cigarette smoke, Montclair has barred smoking in its municipal parks. Thanks to a bill sponsored by Essex County Freeholder Vice President Brendan Gill, who resides in Montclair, Essex County has now prohibited puffing in its parks and reservations, several of which are located in Montclair or abutting our township.

Cigarette smoke is laden with chemicals, some of which are carcinogenic. Smoking is a personal choice, but smoke containing tobacco components and added chemicals can affect other people. The healthcare costs of smokers afflicted with lung cancer or another tobacco-related respiratory or cardiac disease also affect taxpayers and health-insurance ratepayers. Even as they degrade their own health, many smokers are oblivious that their discards degrade our parks, sidewalks, streets, and other public properties when they toss their cigarette butts on the ground.

Unlike smoke, cigarette butts do not waft away in the breeze. Cigarette butts litter our parks, sidewalks, and streets. As noted by Longwood University: "Most cigarette filters are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic. The white fibers you see in a cigarette filter are NOT cotton, but a plastic that can persist in the environment as long as other forms of plastic."

Fifteen years ago, an article published in an American Littoral Society bulletin noted, "Smokers discard billions of cigarette butts yearly, tossing many directly into the environment. Cigarette butts accumulate outside of buildings, on parking lots and streets where they can be transported through storm drains to streams, rivers, and beaches."

The prohibition on smoking tobacco in Montclair's and Essex County's parks is justified. The litter of cigarette butts is irrefutable. Butts are everywhere, blemishing even the most beautiful settings.

Endless and enduring littering of cigarette butts in our local and county parks is sufficient reason to, cough, cough, prohibit smoking cigarettes in them.

<http://www.northjersey.com/opinion/opinion-editorials/butt-out-1.1438006>