Public Health Solutions

Tobacco Product Waste

Each year, trillions of tobacco products are improperly disposed of and end up as litter on sidewalks, highways, oceans and various bodies of water. This waste directly harms our communities and makes our world more toxic. NYC Smoke-Free, a program of Public Health Solutions, works to bring awareness about the issue of tobacco product waste so all New Yorkers can live free from tobacco litter and pollutants.

What is Tobacco Product Waste?

Tobacco product waste refers to any component, part, or remnant of a commercial tobacco product. Tobacco product waste includes plastic cigarette butts, e-cigarette batteries/cartridges/plastic casings, cigar tips, hazardous nicotine and other chemicals and metals, as well as plastic wrapping of all kinds.

Environmental Effects

- Cigarette butts are made of a plastic called cellulose acetate and they are not biodegradable. Cellulose acetate eventually breaks down into thousands of microplastic fibers and have been found in the stomachs of aquatic and semi-aquatic animals as well as deep in the ocean.
- E-cigarette-related waste is a serious environmental threat because it contains metal, circuitry, disposable plastic cartridges, batteries, and toxic chemicals in e-liquids.
- Tobacco production uses more water and wood, and has more pesticides applied to it, than most other crops, further affecting water supplies and contamination of the soil. As of 2022, tobacco farming is responsible for 5% of all global deforestation.

How You Can Help

- Organize a litter clean-up in your neighborhood and document how much tobacco product waste you find
- Reach out to leaders in your community and educate them on the dangers brought about by tobacco product waste
- Be sure to properly and safely dispose of tobacco product waste. Search online for household hazardous waste collections near you or contact your local solid waste agency for more information

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Cigarette butts are the #1 most littered item on the planet

4.5 trillion cigarette butts weighing 850,000 tons are littered each year – roughly thirty times the weight of the Statue of Liberty.

NYC ships all confiscated and collected e-cigarette devices to Gum Springs, Arkansas, where they are incinerated by Veolia, Inc., an international waste management company. Veolia has incinerated 1.6 million pounds of e-cigarette waste over the last few years.

Safe Disposal

Special Waste Drop-off sites are available for NYC residents to drop off certain harmful household products that are dangerous and illegal to dispose of with trash or recycling, such as e-cigarettes.

Sites are in all five boroughs and are open every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM (closed legal holidays and during severe weather). Please visit https://www.nyc.gov/site/dsny/what-we-do/programs/special-waste-drop-off.page for site locations, rules and procedures and additional details.

Addressing the Root Cause

The most effective way to reduce tobacco product waste and its environmental impact is to reduce the amount of tobacco products being manufactured and distributed.

NYC Smoke-Free's Tobacco Waste Clean-ups

As NYC Smoke-Free continues to raise awareness about tobacco product waste, we're also committed in taking action! Organizing or joining a tobacco waste clean-up is a meaningful way to get involved, connect with other New Yorkers and keep our communities clean and beautiful.

Public Health Solutions

Public Health Solutions (PHS) is the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City. For over 60 years, PHS has improved health outcomes and helped families thrive by providing services directly to the city's most vulnerable populations, publishing groundbreaking research that moves public health policy and practice forward, and supporting over 200 community-based organizations through our long-standing government partnerships.

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