

Club Alpbach France - Inputs to UNOC3

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300.000 cigarette butts (CBs) will be littered by the time you finish reading this sentence.*

Cigarette butts are the main polluters of the oceans. Their main highly toxic waste. Their main plastic waste. They pollute ecosystems and cause serious damages to biodiversity.

Why are they almost never taken into account in water governance and pollution prevention discussions?

In the coming months, the [European Tobacco Products Directive 2014/40/EU](#) (TPD) is expected to be revised for the first time in 10 years. This text regulates cigarette and roll-your-own tobacco packaging. It should be a key moment for EU policymakers to take bold action to put an end to this pollution, protect biodiversity, freshwater and ocean, improve waste management, reduce forest fires, and ensure that both environmental and health issues are considered.

That's why with scientists, NGOs, young generations, companies, and civil society, we are joining forces to advocate for the incorporation of the following recommendations:

01 Add ecotoxicity warnings on cigarette/roll-your-own packs.

These messages must be displayed alongside health warnings. They shouldn't imply guilt or stigmatise: **they should raise awareness on the impact of the tobacco industry on the environment.** We recommend that each EU Member States also print these messages on cigarettes, following the example of the new [Canadian legislation](#).

02 Plan a phase-out of filters (plastic and non-plastic) by 2030 – and ban misleading messages about biodegradable filters.

The current revision of the *Tobacco Product Directive 2014/40/EU* should be in line with the *EU Directive on Single-Use Plastics (2019/904)* aiming to reduce plastic pollution. Biodegradable filters (plastic-free filters) are not the solution: they are not safe for the environment since cigarette butts toxic substances also spread through ecosystems. That's why we advise EU Member States to consider cigarette butts as a toxic waste. Moreover, as filters have no health benefits and may aggravate some diseases and cancers, we call the EU to ban filters.

03 Make tobacco manufacturers pay for the costs of removing and cleaning up cigarette butts.

Cleaning up and removing cigarette butts costs yearly millions of euros for local authorities. The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) of the tobacco industry must be engaged: they should contribute to the costs of cleaning and environmental remediation.



Fact checking the impact of CBs

54,000 to 123,000 CBs are improperly littered every second worldwide.

Roughly 33% to 75% of CBs are disposed of into the environment. Based on an annual figure of around 5.2 trillion cigarettes consumed worldwide, between 1.7 and 3.9 trillion CBs are improperly littered.

Clean up measures to collect a few million butts worldwide are trivial in the face of trillions polluting the environment.

CBs are hazardous waste, mainly due to their nicotine content.

According to the *Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC* classification, CBs are hazardous waste: they contain nicotine (a pesticide), lead, heavy metals, ammonia, cadmium, and more than 2 500 other substances. Most of them are toxic. They impact microbes, plants, benthic organisms, bivalves, zooplankton, fish, mammals etc. One cigarette butt soaked in a liter of water killed half of the fish exposed.

Elution of nicotine occurs rapidly in still water: one CB may contaminate up to 1000 L of water.

CB releases 7,3 mg of nicotine in standing water, 50% of which occurred within the first 27 min. Given the continuous littering of cigarette butts and the rapid release of nicotine, CBs are assessed to be a relevant threat to the quality of urban waters and consequently to drinking water. **Clean-ups are not satisfactory solutions** as they don't prevent the rapid transfer of chemical contaminants in the environment. One CB can pollute above the predicted no effect concentration (PNEC) as much as 100 L of water, even if estimates vary from 30 L to 1000 L, depending on a variety of factors.

Environmental warnings on packs leads to less littering intentions.

Throwing CBs out of public ashtrays could be encouraged. Social behavior studies demonstrate that environmental warnings have great potential to influence pro-environmental behavior. Littering practices are most likely among people who believe butts are biodegradable and not harmful to the environment. They don't see CBs as waste and don't yet consider littered CBs as a nuisance.

In direct response to:



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* Conservative estimate. All other data presented in this document comes from peer-reviewed scientific reports. Contact us for more information.

