

EARTH TALK™

From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Has anyone ever studied the environmental impact of discarded cigarettes? I'm constantly appalled at the number of drivers I see pitching their butts out their car windows.

— Ned Jordan, via email

It's true that littered cigarette butts are a public nuisance, and not just for aesthetic reasons. The filters on cigarettes—four fifths of all cigarettes have them—are made of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic that is very slow to degrade in the environment.

A typical cigarette butt can take anywhere from 18 months to 10 years to decompose, depending on environmental conditions.

But beyond the plastic, these filters—which are on cigarettes in the first place to absorb contaminants to prevent them from going into the lungs—contain trace amounts of toxins like cadmium, arsenic and lead.

Thus when smokers discard their butts improperly—out the car window or off the end of a pier or onto the sidewalk below—they are essentially tossing these substances willy-nilly into the environment.

Studies done by Johns Hopkins University, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and even the tobacco industry itself show that these contaminants can get into soils and waterways, harm or kill living organisms and generally degrade surrounding ecosystems.

While individual discarded cigarette butts may be small, they add up to a huge problem. Some 5.5 trillion cigarettes are consumed worldwide each year. The non-profit Keep America Beautiful reports that cigarette butts constitute as much as one-third of all litter nationwide when measured by the number of discarded items, not volume.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, a non-profit that advocates for stronger protection of marine ecosystems, cigarette butts are the most commonly littered item found on America's salt and fresh water beaches according to feedback received by hundreds of thousands of volunteers taking part in the group's annual Coastal Clean-up event.

While the tobacco industry may have its hands full just trying to stay afloat in the maelstrom of ongoing bad publicity,

critics say it should be doing more to prevent cigarette butt litter.

"Just as beverage manufacturers contribute to anti-litter campaigns, and have invested in public education on litter issues, so too should the tobacco industry," says Kathleen Register, founder and executive director of Clean Virginia Waterways.

Clean Virginia Waterways is a non-profit that has spearheaded the fight against cigarette butt litter in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Register adds that cigarette manufacturers "need to take an active and responsible role in educating smokers about this issue and devote resources to the cleanup of cigarette litter."

Register suggests a number of strategies including putting anti-litter messages on all cigarette packaging and advertisements, distributing small, free portable ashtrays, and placing and maintaining outdoor ashtrays in areas where smokers congregate.

Register also suggests putting an extra tax on cigarette sales, with proceeds going toward anti-litter education efforts and to defray the costs of cleaning up butts. "Picking up littered cigarette butts costs schools, businesses and park agencies money," she says.

"By taxing smokers for anti-litter educational efforts, some of the costs of cleaning up cigarette butts will shift onto smokers." One way or another, Register hopes, smokers will learn that



Studies done by Johns Hopkins University, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and even the tobacco industry itself show that contaminants from cigarette butts can get into soils and waterways, harm or kill living organisms and generally degrade surrounding ecosystems. (Photo by Jason Means, courtesy Flickr)

the Earth is not one giant ashtray.

CONTACTS: CDC, www.cdc.gov; Clean Virginia Waterways, www.longwood.edu/cleanva.

SEND YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS TO: EarthTalk®, P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; earthtalk@emagazine.com. Read past columns at: www.emagazine.com/earthtalk/archives.php.

POST A TO Z BUSINESS CARD DIRECTORY 503-244-6933

AMERICHoice
CONTRACTORS LLC
CCB # 178799

503-267-0276
americhoicecontractors.com

Roof Cleaning
Moss Removal & Preservation

FREE Gutter Cleaning
with any Roof Cleaning

Super Value
\$130.00
Gutter Cleaning
Any House
New Customers Only

Gutter Guards
Never Clean Your
Gutters Again!
***Money Back Guarantee

Flu Shot Clinics
open to the public

Call Vax America to Pre-Register
1-888-444-8522
9/10, 10/8, 11/12, 12/10 9:00am- 11:00am

Beaverton Hills Assisted Living
4525 SW 99th Ave Beaverton, OR 97005

CZ BECKER COMPANY
WOOD FLOORS
A Family Owned Business Since 1982



- Restoration Repairs & Refinishing
- State of the Art Dust Containment
- Installation of New Wood Floors
- Environmentally Friendly Finishes

503.282.0623
czbek.com

CCB #48132

Woof. Meow. Hooray.

A separate clinic
for dogs.

A separate clinic
for cats.

Peace under
one roof.



Best Friends Veterinary
Medical Center

503-892-6387

Dave's Green Clean
Seriously Clean • Seriously Green

HEPA Filtration
People Friendly Products

Affordable
Flexible Hours • Free Quotes
Referrals Available

Dave Brandes
503-244-1876
davebrandx@gmail.com



Decks • Stairs • Rails • Trellises • Screens • Benches

DECKS

I live in the neighborhood. CCB #173192

Davis Hart...503-888-4342...DecksByDavis.com

Julia Fitzgerald
phone: 503-244-6905
fax: 503-244-4569
julia@juliafitzgeraldcpa.com
www.juliafitzgeraldcpa.com
4620 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy, Suite B-4; Portland, OR 97221



Julia Fitzgerald, CPA, PC

A professional resource for your home business or small business.
QuickBooks® • Taxes • Business Development

 **GARFINKLE**
ORTHODONTICS
HIGH TECH HIGH TOUCH

Complimentary Evaluations for
Children and Adults

1616 SW Sunset Blvd., Portland, OR 97239
Phone: 503-246-9802 Fax: 503-246-9995
info@garfinkleortho.com www.garfinkleortho.com

 **Healthy Pets**
Northwest

The Natural Alternative for Pet Foods & Supplies

7642 SW Capitol Hwy • 971-222-2686

All Natural Foods • Herbal & Homeopathic Remedies
Allergy Relief • Raw Food Diets • Grooming Products
Collars • Leashes • Toys • Books

10-7 M-F, 10-6 Sat, 12-5 Sun • www.healthypetsnw.com

 **MVP, Inc.**
Volvo Service & Repair

OWNED AND OPERATED BY A VOLVO MASTER TECHNICIAN

VOLVO **Paul Erickson**
Office: 503-892-9405
Fax: 503-892-8763
E-mail: info@mvpvolvo.com

- Service
- Repair
- Performance

3530-A SW Multnomah Blvd., Portland, OR 97219
(across from John's Marketplace)
www.mvpvolvo.com

 **THE OLD MILL**
Brand
(503) 642-5661

Our locally-owned company
offers imported private label
wine from Chile, at a terrific
value of **\$5.75/BTL.**

Place orders online with malarkey@oldmillrum.com – delivery
is free of charge, Visa and Mastercard are accepted, and mixed
cases are no problem!

Excellent Wine • Reasonably Priced
Minimum Order One Case

 

Authorized Oregon wine distributor

Pacific Northwest Gardening Consultants



Providing Environmentally Sensitive Solutions
to Landscape Problems

Local Garden Home residents and authors of
"The Pacific Northwest Gardening Book of Lists"

Ray and Jan McNeilan
8536 SW 56th Avenue, Portland, OR 97219-3132
pnwgardening@aol.com, 503-245-3840