

Kicking Plastic's Butt: Cigarette Butt Fact Sheet

Cigarette butts are one of the most common forms of anthropogenic debris

Five trillion cigarettes are smoked every year, creating five trillion cigarette butts.

Source: [The Tobacco Atlas, 2018](#)

- In 2021, cigarette butts were the top item found during the International Coastal Cleanup, with 964,521 (just under one million) butts collected in cleanups around the world.
Source: [Ocean Conservancy, 2021](#)
- Cigarette butts are also the most common large debris item we find in our local Seabins and shorelines of Toronto. In a single day, our team picked up more than 6000 butts!
Source: <https://uofttrashteam.ca/2022/03/31/ittn2021/>,
<https://uofttrashteam.ca/2021/11/11/ulc2021/>
- Cigarette butts are the most common item of litter on Earth. From over 35 years of data collection, cigarette butts are by far the most abundant item collected during the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup.
Source: [Ocean Conservancy: Cleanup Reports, 2022](#)

Cigarette butts contain plastic and shed synthetic microfibers

- Cigarette butts, i.e., cigarette filters, are made from cellulose acetate, a type of plastic and thus does not biodegrade. When cigarette butts are littered, they persist and pollute the environment.
Source: [Kurmus & Mohajerani, 2020](#)
- It is estimated that each cigarette butt is made up of over 15,000 detachable strands of synthetic microfibers. Global cigarette butt pollution releases about 300,000 tons of microfibers into the environment every year.
Source: [Belzagui et al. 2021](#), [Shen et al. 2021](#)

Cigarette butts contain toxic chemicals that harm wildlife

- Cigarette butts are hazardous. They contain more than 4,000 toxic chemicals including tar, arsenic, lead, heavy metals, PAHs and other harmful substances.
Source: [Kurmus & Mohajerani, 2020](#)
- 69 of the chemicals in cigarette butts are carcinogenic to both animals and humans.
Source: [Hoffman et al. 2001](#)
- Approximately 7,800 tons of dangerous chemicals are released into the environment every year with cigarette butt litter.
Source: [Parker and Rayburn, 2017](#)
- Littered cigarette butts leach these chemicals into their surrounding environments. Laboratory studies have found cigarette butt leachate leads to toxic effects in marine and freshwater and terrestrial species, ranging from malnutrition to death.
Source: [Caridi et al. 2020](#), [Dobaradaran et al. 2021](#), [Green et al. 2022](#).