Cigarette butts are the most common form of plastic litter in the world.

There are more than 4 billion cigarettes smoked in Scotland every year.

Globally more than 4.5 trillion cigarette butts make their way into the environment every year.

Almost all of them contain a filter made of fibres of cellulose acetate – a form of plastic. These filters can eventually degrade, but this can take up to 12 years.

Cigarette butts leak toxins that contaminate water and harm marine life and the environment. They have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures, who mistake them for food.

Cigarette filters do not actually reduce the harm caused to smokers. What they do is trap some of the tar and smoke particles from lit cigarettes and cool the smoke slightly, making it easier to inhale.

Background

Plastic cigarette filters are the most pervasive form of litter in the world. These filters are unnecessary and actively unhelpful from a health perspective and merely serve to make the act of smoking less unpleasant.

ASH Scotland supports a “polluter pays” scheme to force transnational tobacco companies to pay for the costs of comprehensive clean up measures. This should be done through law, rather than by engaging with voluntary schemes set up by the industry, in line with the requirements of Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.[1]

Information about the environmental impact of cigarette butts

- Cigarette butts are ubiquitous, making up 19-38% of the litter collected on beaches worldwide each year[2]
- These filters can degrade, but this can take up to 12 years depending on environmental conditions
- Cigarette filters consist of fibres of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic
- More than 4.5 trillion cigarette butts make their way into the environment every year
- Cigarette butts leak toxins that contaminate water and harm marine life and the environment
- Cigarette filters have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures, who mistake them for food

Cigarette filters make cigarettes easier to smoke, not less harmful

- Filters trap some of the tar and smoke particles from lit cigarettes and cool the smoke slightly, making it easier to inhale[3]

- Tobacco companies introduced filter-tipped cigarettes in the 1950s following the emergence of research linking smoking to lung cancer [4]
- The ineffectiveness of cigarette filters and the tobacco industry's misleading marketing of the benefits of filtered cigarettes are well documented[4]
- In the mid 1960's the US Surgeon General judged filters to be useless in reducing harm to smokers, and research conducted since continues to support this conclusion.
- A 2011 study concludes that the 'shift from nonfilter to filter cigarettes appears to have merely altered the most frequent type of lung cancer, from squamous cell carcinoma to adenocarcinoma'[5]

Information about the volume and cost of tobacco litter for Scotland

- Smoking related litter is the most common type of litter on the streets of Scotland.
- Over half of all streets in Scotland have some form of smoking related litter - closer to 75% in towns and cities
- 122 tons of cigarette butts and cigarette related litter is dropped every day in the UK
- The cost of clearing smoking-related litter in Scotland has been estimated at £34 million per annum[6]

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[1] World Health Organization. (2003). *WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.* Available from: http://www.who.int/fctc/en/

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[3] ASH. Factsheet: What's in a cigarette. [Online] 2009. Available from: http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_117.pdf

[4] Harris, B. The intractable cigarette 'filter problem'. Tobacco Control 20(Supp 1): i10-i16, 2011.

[5] Ito,H. et al. Nonfilter and filter cigarette consumption and the incidence of lung cancer by histological type in Japan and the United States: analysis of 30-year data from population-based cancer registries. *International Journal of Cancer* 128(8):pp.1918-28, 2011.

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