

Protect OUR health: cigarettes & the environment



By Jamie Gore

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The next time you consider buying a pack of cigarettes, I challenge you to consider instead the health impact and harm that smoking causes on your own body, as well as the health impact and harm that producing and consuming this product causes on our planet. From growing the tobacco plant to flicking the used butt on the ground, the environmental impact is extensive. Here are the top ways in which cigarettes, their smoke and the left-over butts harm our environment:

Cigarettes:

- Deforestation: 600 million trees are destroyed to provide fuel to dry tobacco leaves each year and more than four miles of paper per hour is used when making cigarettes. This doesn't even include the packaging.
- Global Warming: Using wood or other heat sources such as coal and oil to cure the tobacco pumps even more heat into our environment.

- Soil: Tobacco plants use nutrients found in soil faster than most crops, which creates unfertile soil, making it hard to grow more or other plants in that area.
- Pesticides: Used when growing tobacco along with huge amounts of fertilizer and herbicides are poisoning waterways and food chains.
- Fire risk: Lit cigarettes are the leading cause of fire related deaths in the U.S. Fire does damage to our environment as well by releasing toxins when burning items not intended for burning.

Cigarette smoke is the main source of indoor air pollution in the U.S. and is known as a worldwide air pollutant. In 2006 the Surgeon General's Report warned, "There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke."

Cigarette Butts:

- Litter: Butts are the most common form of litter worldwide. On the UO campus alone, 5,518 butts were picked up in just a half hour.

- Disintegration: Butts are thought to be made of cotton, but in reality are made from cellulose acetate, a synthetic fiber that takes up to 25 years to decompose.
- Water: Butts are swept into rivers, streams, lakes, oceans and down drains, where animals might ingest them, causing death. They also get into our water system by being swept into our waterways when it rains hard enough.
- Soil: Toxins seep into the ground from chemicals trapped in the cigarette butt, thus contaminating our soil and groundwater.

So, the next time you go to buy a pack, remember that it is not only affecting your health but also the health of our environment. By quitting, your carbon imprint on the earth will be much smaller.

For cessation support, drop by the Health Center and meet with a practitioner; or stop by the Peer Health Office for your quit kit, and meet with a peer to strategize quit options. The earth thanks you!



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Hours:

**M – F, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sat, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.**

Located on the corner of 13th & Agate. For appointments or After-Hours Nurse Advice Line, call (541) 346-2770. Please see <http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu> for After-Hours Care Options during Health Center closures.



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