

# Smoking: litter

Although the number of smokers is falling, cigarette litter remains a problem. Cigarette litter is present on 73% of England's streets. This litter poses a safety risk, is an environmental hazard and cleaning it up costs local authorities. However, councils can make a difference to the appearance and safety of local communities by taking a few simple steps.

## Cigarette butts are the single most littered item in England

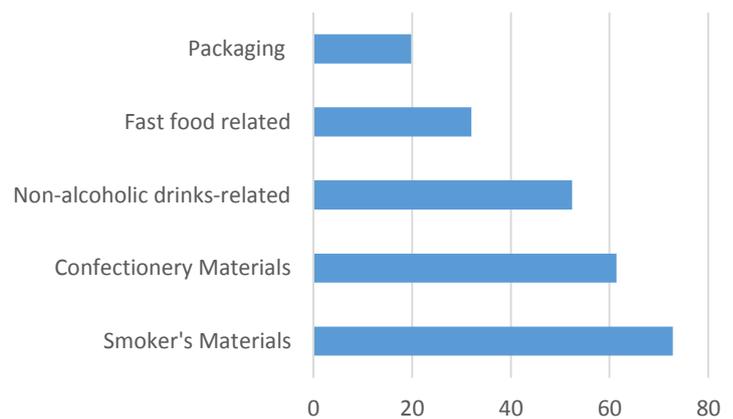
[31bn filtered cigarettes](#) are smoked every year in England, resulting in approximately [5225 tonnes of waste](#) annually.

Of this, more than [1202 tonnes](#) of cigarette waste is discarded as litter that must be collected by local government street cleaning services.

In 2014/2015 smokers litter was recorded on [73% of sites](#) in Keep Britain Tidy's annual survey and the results also show a distinct link between levels of deprivation and the level of cigarette butts found on sites.

Smokers' materials not only affect more sites than any other type of litter but are considerably more widespread than all the other litter types. This is one of the reasons to support tobacco free areas such as playgrounds.

Prevalence of types of litter 2014/15



Source: [Keep Britain Tidy, 2015](#)

## Smokers' litter harms the environment and our local communities

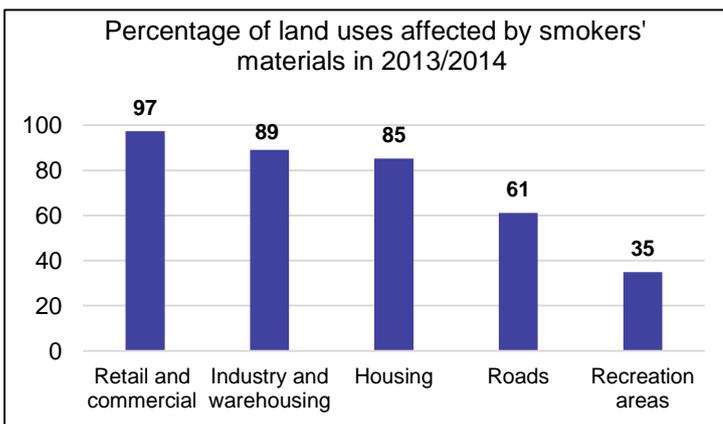
Cigarette butts cause serious environmental problems, taking up to [12 years](#) to biodegrade.

Butts contain thousands of toxic chemicals, including arsenic.

Smoking litter also harms wildlife, contaminates water supplies and can cause fires.

Smoking litter is found around over 80% of housing in England and cigarette butts are also the most common form of litter found in beach clean ups.

Percentage of land uses affected by smokers' materials in 2013/2014



Source: [Keep Britain Tidy, 2014](#)

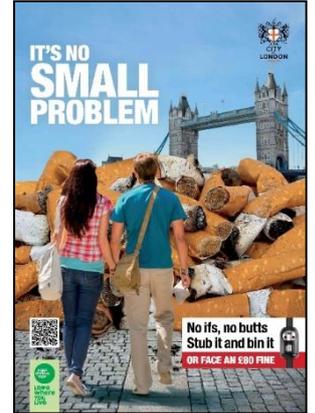
**Research suggests that many smokers don't consider cigarette butts to be litter. Campaigns to prevent smoking-related litter need an educational component as well as enforcement. Additionally, fewer smokers means fewer people to drop smoking litter so helping people quit also has a role in play.**



## Campaign, educate, enforce

Dropping cigarette ends and not disposing of them properly is a criminal offence. However, before fining smokers it is important to communicate to them that this will be taking place and offer them an acceptable alternative to their littering behaviour such as a portable ashtray.

All campaigns to reduce smoking litter should be backed up by a suitable enforcement strategy, which research shows has the support of both the general public and smokers.



Poster from City of London campaign – for information on running a similar campaign, please contact Keep Britain Tidy.

## Tackling smoking-related litter can support wider objectives

Reducing smoking-related litter can support a number of other council objectives.

There are opportunities to combine health messages with anti-litter campaigns and find innovative ways to reach out to smokers and encourage them to quit.

Campaigns could also consider including harm reduction messages based on the [NICE tobacco harm reduction guidance](#) encouraging smokers to reduce their consumption where they can't quit.

Sites that aim to be smokefree, such as healthcare settings, have found that removing smoking-related litter is an important part of ensuring people take rules seriously through reducing the number of cues to smoke.



## Protecting health policy from the tobacco industry

The UK is a party to the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which obliges local government to protect local policy from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. This includes CSR activity and partnerships and means that local councils should not work in partnership with tobacco companies to clean up smoking-related litter.

To find out more about the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control please see the ASH briefing on Protecting Local Health Policy: <http://ash.org.uk/localtoolkit/docs/cllr-briefings/Article5three.ppt>.

