Last Update 9/25/2025



Overview

Between 2013 - 2024, SOS collected **463,783 cigarette butts** from beaches, rivers, open spaces, and public areas! As the singularly most identifiable item littered locally, we know this is just a snapshot of the cigarette litter that continues to negatively impact human and ecosystem health.

Did you know that cigarette butt litter is not only single-use plastic waste, but it's toxic waste? The cost of cigarette butt litter is high, both economically and environmentally. Cigarette filters in the environment will break up into as many as 15,000 microfibers, irreversibly polluting our waters and environment with ever smaller bits of plastic that are essentially impossible to remove. The butts leach toxic chemicals into the environment including nicotine, lead, and arsenic that contaminate our food, soil, and water. The cities we call home each allocate an estimated $3–16 million annually to remove public litter and cigarette butts from our streets, parks, and waterways. Picking up littered items including cigarette butts costs taxpayers and organizations big money.

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For example, California invested $1.1 billion in state and local waste clean-up in 2021 alone. Together we can ban the sale of filtered cigarettes!

Take Action!

Contact your Representatives! Suggested actions are listed in order of effectiveness. The order of suggested actions will differ between jurisdictions based on the current level of discussion of Ban the Butt as potential legislation. Showing interest as a resident is the first step!

Please share out with fellow community members, the more voices added, the better our representatives can hear us! You can find shareable images for social media and email sharing at the bottom of this document.

Contact Your Representatives

City of Watsonville

1. Send letters/emails to city council expressing support for a ban on the sale of filtered tobacco products. (see Suggested Letter/Email Content)
   Address to: Watsonville City Council Members
   275 Main St., Suite 400, Watsonville, CA 95076
   Call: 831-768-3010
2. Email citycouncil@cityofwatsonville.org, cityclerk@cityofwatsonville.org, citymanager@cityofwatsonville.org
3. Save Our Shores Sign on letter

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City of Scotts Valley

1. Send letters/emails to city council expressing support for a ban on the sale of filtered tobacco products. (see Suggested Letter/Email Content)
   Address to: Scotts Valley City Council Members
   1 Civic Center Drive, Scotts Valley, CA 95066
2. Call: 831-440-5600
3. Email: citycouncil@scottsvalley.gov
4. Save Our Shores Sign on letter

City of Monterey

1. Send letters/emails to city council expressing support for a ban on the sale of filtered tobacco products. (see Suggested Letter/Email Content)
   Address to: Monterey City Council Members
   580 Pacific St, Monterey, CA 93940
2. Call: 831-646-3799
3. Email: twilliamson@monterey.gov, kbarber@monterey.gov, ggarcia@monterey.gov, rasch@monterey.gov, smith@monterey.gov
4. Save Our Shores Sign on letter

City of Capitola

The Capitola City Council approved this ordinance in **September 2025**! The ordinance will go into effect July 2027.

City of Santa Cruz

The Santa Cruz City Council approved this ordinance **June 2025**! Goes into effect January 2027.

Unincorporated Santa Cruz County

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Unincorporated Santa Cruz approved this ordinance **October 2024**! With the stipulation that 2 cities approve similar ordinances by or after January 2027.

Suggested Letter/Email Content

Letter/Email Outline

Are you concerned about cigarette butt waste? Tell your local policy makers to Ban the Butt! Personalized letters are most effective, take a moment to add personal touches.

1. Where do you see cigarette butts?
2. Why are they a problem? (*see talking points below*)
3. How do they impact you, your family, our community, and the environment? (*see talking points below*)
4. Ask your city council to ban the sale of filtered tobacco products.

Letter/Email Template

Dear _____,

I urge you to take action against one of the most pervasive and harmful forms of litter - cigarette butts. These toxic plastic filters are a major environmental, health, and economic burden on our community.

Cigarette butts are the most littered item in the world, and locally, they wash into Monterey Bay, contributing to ocean pollution and harming marine life. These filters do not biodegrade; instead, they break into microplastics and leach toxic chemicals like lead, arsenic, and nicotine into our environment. They are also a fire hazard, responsible for burning nearly 89,000 acres in California since 1980.

The financial burden of cigarette butt cleanup falls on local governments and volunteers rather than the tobacco companies responsible for the waste. In

California alone, Caltrans spends nearly $14 million annually on cigarette litter cleanup.

I urge you to introduce and support a ban on the sale of filtered tobacco products in our city.

Eliminating these non-essential and harmful filters will significantly reduce pollution, protect public health, and lessen the financial strain on our local government.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this critical issue. I look forward to your response.

Talking Points

They're an Environmental Problem

- Cigarette butts are the most littered item in the world, locally they are washed into the Monterey Bay and contribute to a common form of litter in the world's oceans.
- Cigarette butts are a non-biodegradable plastic, which breaks into microplastics and bioaccumulates in marine organisms.
- Cigarette butts are toxic waste, leaching dangerous chemicals such as lead, arsenic, and nicotine into the environment.
- Cigarette butts are a fire hazard, responsible for burning 88,898 acres in CA since 1980.

They're a Human Health Problem

- Cigarette butts are the remnants of a product responsible for killing almost half a million people in the U.S. each year, including 40,000 Californians.
- There are between 2,000-7,000 chemicals in cigarettes, including 65 carcinogens that cause cancer / chronic disease.

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- Tobacco waste is a health equity issue, disproportionately found in lower income communities / communities of color.

They're an Economic Problem

- Caltrans alone spends roughly $13,940,000 a year cleaning up discarded butts in California.
- Big Tobacco takes no responsibility for its toxic waste, forcing the physical and financial burden of cleanup onto local government agencies and volunteer organizations.

Head to the Tobacco Waste Subcommittee page for fact sheets, websites, videos, and other resources.

Content to Share

Access Shareable Images

Click here to access shareable images.

Suggested Captions:

"*Together we can ban the sale of filtered cigarettes!*

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For advocacy materials, find the SOS toolkit in the @saveourshores bio"

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“*Did you know that cigarette butt litter is not only single-use plastic waste, but it’s toxic waste? The cost of cigarette butt litter is high, both economically and environmentally. Cigarette filters in the environment will break up into as many as 15,000 microfibers, further polluting our waters and environment with ever smaller bits of plastic that are essentially impossible to remove. The butts leach toxic chemicals into the environment including nicotine, lead, and arsenic that contaminate our food, soil, and water.*

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Profile Tags

@saveourshores, @banthebuttsc, @thecigarettesurfboard, @cityofcapitola, @officialcityofsantacruz, @cityofmonterey, @cityofscottsvalley

Tag your local council members!

Hashtags

#saveourshores #thecigarettesurfboard #banthebutt #santacruz #montereybay #advocacy

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