

Going Green in Londonderry

Don't be a Butthead

Spring is here. And what has winter left behind? Cigarette butts! They are the #1 debris item in the state. Volunteers in one year collected an estimated 52,000 butts - and the numbers have only been growing.

Most people assume cigarette butts are harmless and will break down in the environment, but cigarette filters are not biodegradable. They are made of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic that can take many years to degrade.

Cigarette butts are not just unsightly litter; they are also a hazard to wildlife, people's health and a fire risk.

Butts contain tar, nicotine and toxic gases that contaminate our water. When it rains, they are washed into nearby waterways and storm drains that flow right to our lakes and rivers. Butts have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures that mistake them for food.

Whether or not you smoke, there are steps you can take to help stop using our environment as an ashtray:

- If you smoke, please don't litter. Carry around a piece of foil or empty tin container to put your cigarette butt in when you are away from an ashtray.
- Don't flush cigarette butts down the toilet. They do not biodegrade and may clog your septic system.
- Participate in or organize a local litter cleanup and make sure that picking up cigarette butts is part of that effort. Raising awareness of the issue helps.
- If you own or work at a business, consider placing a cigarette butt receptacle in front of your entrance. While making it more convenient for smokers to do the right thing, this will also decrease your daily cleanup efforts.
- Consider requesting local officials to take a more active role in the issue. In addition to state law, most New Hampshire communities have an ordinance prohibiting litter, including cigarettes. Unfortunately, these ordinances are not enforced as much as they could be.

If you think that one more cigarette butt won't make a difference, think of 52,000 of them picked up from New Hampshire sidewalks, roads and beaches.

~ Courtesy of the Solid Waste and Environment Committee and NH DES ~