

From the Sidewalk and the Street to the Beach and the River: The Economic and Environmental Costs of Cigarette Butt Litter

Protecting Parks, Beaches and Waterways

Residents and tourists in the City of Ottawa enjoy an abundance of Mother Nature:

- **Three major waterways:** the Ottawa River, the Rideau River and the Rideau Canal.
- **Four beaches:** Britannia, Westboro and Petrie Island along the Ottawa River and Mooney's Bay along the Rideau River.
- **1,000 parks** and **650 sportsfields**.¹



Britannia Beach, Ottawa (Courtesy Carmela Graziani)

All of that fun in the summer sun doesn't seem so appealing once you consider that cigarette butts are the number one form of litter recovered along beaches and shore lines both in Canada² and around the world.^{3, 4, 5} More than one billion pounds of cigarette butts litter the world every year.⁶

Toxic Butts

Cigarette filters are made from cellulose acetate, a plastic which can take up to **12 years to breakdown**.⁷ Cellulose acetate is not biodegradable and is considered hazardous solid waste.⁸

Canada manufactured more than 24 billion cigarettes in 2010.⁹ Countless butts are flicked outside, turning our sidewalks, streets, parking lots, parks, sportsfields, beaches and rivers into toxic ashtrays.

Health and Environmental Risks

Cigarette butts:

- Pose a risk to children, family pets and wildlife. Accidental ingestion may cause vomiting and neurological toxicity due to residual nicotine.¹⁰
- Pose a risk to our drinking water supply. Wind and rain carry butts into street drains, local waterways and the ocean.¹¹ Butts leach toxic chemicals such as ethyl phenol and pesticide residues,¹² as well as cadmium, lead and arsenic.¹³
- Pose a risk to marine life. One filtered cigarette butt can kill fish living in a one-litre bucket of water.¹⁴ Cigarette butts have been found in the stomachs of birds, turtles, fish and other marine life.¹⁵

Clean Up Costs

The City of Ottawa spends **\$5.5 million dollars** and over 112,500 hours every year cleaning litter – including cigarette butts – from roads and parks.¹⁶

Let's clean up our parks, beaches and sportsfields where our children play; protect our drinking water supplies and local waterways; and save taxpayers' dollars.



Corner of Albert and O'Connor Streets, Ottawa (Courtesy Penny Becklumb)

Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health

www.smokefreeottawa.com

Smoke-Free Outdoor Spaces: Fact Sheet #2

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