

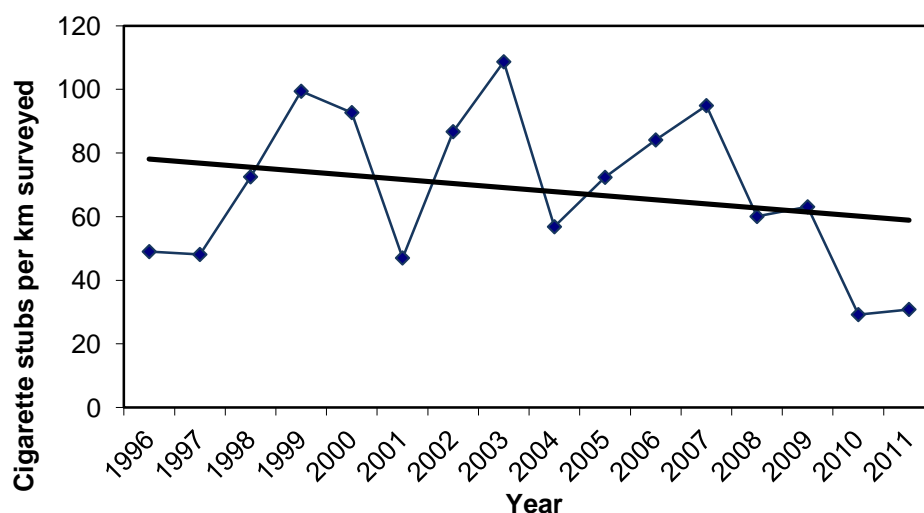
## Cigarette Litter on Beaches – Marine Conservation Society Factsheet

An estimated several trillion cigarette ends enter the environment every year (Cigarette Litter org, 2007).

Cigarette litter is a growing environmental concern in the UK and is found in large numbers on the UK's beaches. Cigarette litter has consistently been the number one item found during the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Clean up for the past 25 years, and in 2010 over 1.8 million cigarette ends were found on beaches around the world (Ocean Conservancy, 2011).

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) organises the annual Beachwatch Big Weekend event; a nationwide beach clean up and litter survey which takes place over the third weekend in September every year. During MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2011, a total of 4,388 cigarette ends were found on 335 beaches around the UK, representing 1.8% of the total litter found. An average of 30 cigarette ends were found for each kilometre of beach surveyed.

**Figure 1: Cigarette stubs recorded per km surveyed during MCS Beachwatch 1996 – 2011**



Over the years we have seen fluctuations in smoking related litter on our beaches and although we are pleased to see a downward trend in cigarette stubs, we will continue to monitor this litter item, particularly as the smoking ban came into force in 2007, to see if the downward trend continues.

It is not just cigarette ends that are found on UK beaches, other smoking related litter includes plastic lighters, pouches and cigarette packets. In 2011, over 1,100 lighters & tobacco pouches and over 500 cigarette packets were found. This brings the total smoking related litter items on UK beaches to an average of **42** items per km surveyed.

Cigarettes found on the beach and in the marine environment do not all come from beach users dropping them on the beach. Cigarette butts discarded in car parks, along pavements and in street gutters miles from the coast, unless swept up, are washed into storm drains, streams and rivers and can eventually end up on our beaches and in our seas.

### Impacts on the Environment

Cigarette ends can be mistaken for food and eaten by marine wildlife. They have been found in the guts of whales, dolphins, sea birds and turtles where they can leach toxic chemicals,

cause inflammation of the animal's digestive system and occasionally (if they cause a blockage of the gut), even death. Cigarette filters are designed to absorb some of the tar and chemicals found in cigarettes such as cadmium, lead and arsenic into our marine environment. However once the filter reaches the sea these toxic chemicals are leached out into the water. Experiments by K. Register in 2000 have shown that one cigarette filter is toxic enough to kill water fleas *Daphnia magna* in 8 litres of water (Register, 2000).

The filters are not biodegradable, as commonly thought, and are not made of paper; they are made from cellulose acetate, a type of plastic and so persist in the environment for many years. Cigarette filters also contain tobacco, a powerful insecticide. Estimates of the time it takes for a cigarette filter to degrade at sea vary from 12-15 years.

### **Marine Conservation Society Policy**

As a conservation organisation MCS' concerns lie not with the issue of smoking itself, but rather with the cigarette end ending up on the beach or in the sea, where they pose a threat to marine wildlife. MCS does not hold an opinion either way on smoking bans – it is for the local authorities to decide whether such action is needed to protect the interests of their beach visitors.

MCS aims to encourage individual responsibility amongst all beach users and if smokers act responsibly and do not drop their cigarette ends there would not be a need for smoking ban on beaches. Individual responsibility, provision of portable cigarette bins (perhaps using recycled film canisters) and better enforcement of fines for the dropping of cigarette ends would perhaps be a fairer way of treating smokers.

Bournemouth beach was the first beach in the UK to ban smoking.

### **What can you do?**

If you are a smoker please take a portable ashtray with you to the beach. This can be as simple as an empty film canister; please remember wherever you are that your discarded cigarette end can still find its way to the beach even if you didn't drop it there to start with.

Encourage hotels, shopping centres and other businesses to place cigarette bins outdoors.

Take part in an MCS beach clean and litter survey to identify the sources of litter so you can see whether cigarette ends are a problem on your beach.

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### **References:**

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