

World No Tobacco Day – May 31, 2013

World Health Organization (WHO) sponsors World No Tobacco Day, May 31, 2013, which highlights the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocates for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption. Public Health advocates recognize that youth are price sensitive and raising the cost of cigarettes will reduce the number of teens who start to smoke. California State PTA supports SB 768 which would raise the tobacco tax by \$2 to fund proven and effective tobacco prevention and cessation programs, as well as improved access to health care for low-income families. It is co-sponsored by the American Cancer Society.

Cigarettes cause environmental problems also; cigarette butts are considered toxic waste, and they are everywhere. In 2005, an estimated 135 million pounds of cigarette butts were dumped into the U.S. environment. Cigarette butts are the most common toxic waste found in cleanups and the number one item found on California highways. In 2010, over one million cigarettes were removed from California beaches and inland waterways as part of the annual International Coastal Cleanup. Worldwide, it is estimated that 1.69 billion pounds of cigarette butts end up as waste each year. A study conducted by the California Department of Transportation found that cigarette butts make up 34 percent of the total waste captured in California. California spends \$41 million annually on waste cleanup.



Beach cleanup in north coastal with youth and parents.

The production of cigarettes is very damaging to the environment. It is estimated that one tree is consumed for every 300 cigarettes produced - that's one tree for every one and a half cartons. Considering 5.6 trillion cigarettes are produced annually worldwide, tobacco devours about 18.6 billion trees every year.

In addition to cigarette butts, cigarette filters and plastic wrap from cigarette packages remain in the environment for long periods of time. Cigarette butts are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic, which can take many (estimated 2 to 25) years to decompose. Wind and rain often carry cigarette butts into waterways, where the toxic chemicals in the cigarette filters leak out, threatening the quality of the water and the creatures that live in it.

The toxic chemicals in cigarette butts are a threat to our aquatic ecosystems. The substances that leach out are highly toxic to freshwater micro-organisms. Plastic wrap has been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales, and other marine creatures that mistake them as food, swallowing harmful plastic and toxic chemicals. Ingestion of plastic cigarette filters is a threat to wildlife. Sometimes even young children pick up and ingest cigarette butts.

Discarded cigarette butts have been linked to large wildfires, resulting in the destruction of wildlife, vegetation and property. Cigarette-induced fires claim hundreds of human and pet lives in California each year, not to mention the millions of dollars in property damage. These fires are the leading cause of apartment fires. Fires caused by cigarette butts claim the lives of about 1,000 people and injure about 3,000 people each year.

Everything about cigarettes can threaten life on our beloved planet. They pollute the ground we walk on and the air we breathe. And if we smoke, cigarettes poison us slowly, stealing our quality of life long before they kill us.