

Pros and Cons of Cigarette Receptacles in Public Spaces

Pros

- Cigarette butts have toxic impacts, leaching toxic chemicals, such as arsenic and lead, and the filters contain microplastics. Once littered, they can easily make their way into waterways, negatively impacting the environment and marine life. If cigarette butt receptacles are used and prevent littering, they will help avoid the negative impacts on the environment and marine life.^{1,2}
- According to “Litter in America”, a Keep America Beautiful national study, just one additional ash receptacle can decrease the amount of cigarette litter by nine percent in its respective area.³
- Surfrider’s San Francisco chapter installed public cigarette receptacles in select neighborhoods and have experienced a 60% decrease in cigarette butt litter (2019).⁴ As of 2021, Surfrider has installed 175 new cigarette receptacles (total of 250), in addition to a public service announcement and infographic.⁵
- Communities who have participated in Keep America Beautiful’s Cigarette Litter Prevention Program have consistently cut cigarette litter by 50%.⁶

Cons

- City staff would need to find time to service the receptacles.
- Potential fire hazard if community members do not put out their cigarette before using the receptacle.⁷
- Potential to encourage smoking. However, a case study in San Francisco’s Union Square did not show any increase in smoker activity.⁸
- Some cities have seen an increase in vandalism, as people attempt to break into the receptacles to access remaining cigarettes.⁹
- The receptacles may be considered unsightly and may add to visual clutter.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/08/magazine/who-made-that-cigarette-filter.html#:~:text=In%20the%201950s%2C%20an%20RI>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31357681/>

³ https://kab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LitterinAmerica_FactSheet_CigaretteButtLitter.pdf

⁴ <https://therevelator.org/cigarette-butt-litter-solutions/>

⁵ <https://sf.surfrider.org/news/2021/08/26/surfrider-foundation-and-noaa-launch-love-sf-hold-on-to-your-butt-campaign-to-prevent-cigarette-litter-in-san-francisco>

⁶ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/june/keep-america-beautiful-cigarette-litter-prevention-program/>

⁷ https://www.ellsworthamerican.com/news/no-butts-about-it-fire-department-urges-caution-with-use-of-cigarette-receptacles/article_baded2d2-ac45-5600-b031-a8e8e56db596.html

⁸ <https://sf.surfrider.org/news/2017/04/24/terracycle-and-the-union-square-bid-a-cigarette-litter-reduction-success-story#:~:text=Have%20they%20seen%20any%20evidence%20that%20the%20receptacles.included%20nightclubs%2C%20youth%20hostels%2C%20and%20near%20trash%20cans%29>

⁹ <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/vandals-blamed-for-cigarette-butts-being-strewn-across-brisbane-city-20171013-p4ywgj.html>