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The Environmental Impact of Cigarette Butt Waste: Just the Facts

1. **Trillions of cigarettes:** 5.6 trillion cigarettes sold globally every year; 360 billion are sold annually in the United States.
2. **Butt waste is everywhere:** 99% of the 360 billion cigarettes sold have cellulose acetate (plastic) filters; at least one-third of those – 120 billion – are discarded into the environment. Washed into rivers, lakes and the ocean, and eaten by birds, animals and fish, they are the most littered item in the U.S. and the world. Smoking-related debris is 1/3 or more of all debris items found on U.S. beaches and in rivers and streams.
3. **Butt waste is not biodegradable:** Filters are non-biodegradable, and while ultraviolet rays from the sun will eventually break them into smaller pieces, the toxic material never disappears.
4. **Butt waste is toxic:** Cigarette butts leach organic chemicals and heavy metals into the environment that are toxic to fresh and salt-water fish. They are poisonous when ingested by children and other living organisms.
5. **Cigarettes kill:** Containing so many highly toxic, carcinogenic chemicals, pesticides, and nicotine, tobacco use is the No. 1 cause of preventable death globally, taking over 5 million lives a year, and is likely to kill 1 billion people this century alone (ten times the 20th century toll).
6. **Cigarette butts are dangerous:** Discarded cigarettes can ignite very destructive, deadly, and injurious fires. More than 900 people in the United States die each year in fires started by cigarettes, and about 2,500 are injured. Nationally, annual human and property costs of fires caused by careless smoking total about \$6 billion.
7. **Butt waste cleanup is expensive:** Cigarette butt waste cleanup is very costly, with a San Francisco litter audit study finding the cost to be more than \$7 million annually. Taxpayers and local authorities currently bear these costs, but cleanup and prevention need to be the responsibility of the tobacco industry.
8. **Filters don't make cigarettes safer:** Many smokers believe filters provide some protection - that they're "safer" - but National Cancer Institute publications, among others, show there have been no benefits to public health from filters. The tobacco industry knows that filters are a fraud.
9. **The tobacco industry blames smokers:** Tobacco companies oppose regulations compelling them to take responsibility for butt waste – despite the widely recognized environmental principle of Extended Producer Responsibility; instead, they say 'the responsibility for proper disposal' of cigarette waste belongs to the smoker.

Butt waste isn't just litter:

Filters falsely reassure smokers, and cigarette waste damages habitat, landscapes, and ecosystems; ignites destructive, deadly fires; poisons wildlife and children; consumes tax dollars for cleanup and disposal; and lasts forever!

Sources: "The Environmental Burden of Cigarette Butts," *Tobacco Control*, April 2011, (http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/20/Supp_1.toc); "The Impact of Tobacco on the Environment," Legacy Factsheet, April 2010 (www.LegacyforHealth.org); "Tobacco and the environment," ASH.fact sheet, 2009 (www.ash.org.uk); CA Dept of Public Health's Butt Waste "Toolkit Project," (www.toxicbutts.com); "Tobacco Watch," Framework Convention Alliance, 2010 (www.fctc.org)