

Tobacco-Free Beaches FAQ:

1. What is the big deal with cigarette butts? Cigarette butts are the single most littered item on beaches - both in Maui County as well as around the world¹. Beaches littered with a high volume of cigarette butts are more likely to have a higher amount of other types of litter than beaches with fewer cigarette butts. By specifically addressing the issue of cigarette butt litter, we are therefore inadvertently addressing the larger issue of trash on our beaches. We believe that cleaner beaches will beget cleaner beaches, and that tackling cigarette butts is an important step.

2. I thought cigarettes could break down in the environment? The cigarette filters that we pick up during beach cleanups can remain in the environment for over 25 years! Pre-World War II, cigarette butts were manufactured utilizing biodegradable materials like cotton and wool. Post-WWII, however, the industry switched to utilizing synthetic materials that were not biodegradable. Today, 95% of cigarette filters are made from the plastic known as cellulose acetate, which never *really* breaks down in the environment. Like other forms of plastic, cellulose acetate is broken down by sunlight into smaller bits of toxic chemicals.

3. How do cigarette butts harm wildlife? Cigarette butts contain 165 toxic chemicals that leach into the sand as well as into ocean water, poisoning marine life and creating unhealthy environments for humans. Cigarette filters have been found in

the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures that mistake them for food. These animals swallow poisonous filters, harmful plastic and toxic chemicals.

4. But aren't there already laws that address littering?

Littering laws only apply if you catch someone in the act - a case that is often times near impossible. A law that specifically prohibits the use of tobacco products on beaches is much easier to enforce and targets the actual act that leads to cigarette butt litter.

5. Are there other places with smokefree beach laws?

You bet! There are 185 municipalities in the U.S. that have] smokefree beach laws. In Southern California alone, over 100 miles of coastline prohibit smoking, with L.A., Santa Barbara and San Diego County beaches all designated as smokefree. Coastal cities like Seattle and New York City have also recently passed smokefree laws, as well as the entire Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In Hawai'i, the Big Island passed a smokefree beaches law in 2008, and the island of O'ahu's smokefree beaches bill went into effect on January 1, 2014.

5. Do tobacco-free beach laws really decrease the amount of littered cigarette butts?

Yes. Studies estimate that tobacco-free beach laws lead to a 45% decrease in cigarette butt litter. Community-based monitoring efforts, as detailed in [The Daily Ocean](#) and [It Starts With Me](#) blogs, support this claim by documenting the number of butts on beaches before and after legislation is implemented. In each case, it is clear that

smokefree beaches have fewer littered cigarette butts than beaches that allow smoking.

6. What about enforcement? While violators of smokefree beach law face fines, community enforcement is an essential piece of the puzzle. In much the same way that it is no longer "normal" to smoke in restaurants or indoors, smokefree highly depend on the creation of new "social norms". In the case of smokefree beaches, community members are likely to inform smokers that smoking is not allowed. A key part to the success of these laws is public education and outreach. Once smokefree laws take effect, municipalities and outreach organizations must make a strong effort to educate and inform the public.

7. Some people argue that smoking is their personal right, especially outdoors - is this true? There is no constitutional right to smoke and smoking is not a specially protected liberty right. Proponents of smokers' rights often claim that: 1. smoking falls within the fundamental right to privacy; and/or 2. laws regulating smoking discriminate against smokers as a particular group and thus violate equal rights laws. Neither of these claims have been upheld by courts (for a more in-depth explanation, visit [A legal right to smoke?](#)). Also consider the converse: don't nonsmokers have a right to clean air and healthy environments? An estimated 20% of Maui County residents smoke, meaning that the majority of our island community does not smoke and is negatively impacted by the actions of smokers.

8. How can I get involved? The quickest and easiest way to help out with Maui County smokefree beaches is to [show your support by signing the petition](#). Our ultimate goal, however, is to eliminate cigarette butt litter along coastlines *across the world!* Start your own Butts Off the Beach campaign to eliminate cigarette litter at a beach near you!

References:

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