

Tobacco and the environment

When people smoke they not only damage their own health, they also damage the environment.

Tobacco production and the environment

Cigarettes are made from the dried leaves of the tobacco plant. In many countries they use wood to provide heat to dry these leaves. One hectare of forest is needed to dry every hectare of tobacco. Nearly 5 million hectares (600 million trees) of forest are destroyed each year to provide trees to dry tobacco.

In developed countries coal, oil or LP gas can be used as fuel to dry tobacco leaves. However, many less developed countries depend on wood for fuel to dry tobacco. Of the 4.1 million hectares of land around the world that is used to grow tobacco, 73% is in poorer countries.

Estimates of the amount of wood required to dry one kilogram of tobacco vary from a minimum of 5kg to as much as 230kg. In some countries wood is used for heating and cooking. When it is also used for drying tobacco, there is less wood available for cooking and heating.



Forests act like a sponge, releasing water slowly to the land around. Without forests, flooding and drought become more likely.

In many poorer countries where food is already in short supply, tobacco companies encourage local farmers to grow tobacco instead of food. Sometimes this results in even less food being available for the community. Tobacco plants take more nutrients from the soil than these food crops. They also need lots of pesticides and fertilisers to keep them free from diseases. These chemicals can affect the health of the farmers and their families.

Because cigarettes are wrapped in paper and sold in packs, they use large amounts of paper and therefore forest resources. A modern cigarette manufacturing machine uses six kilometres of paper per hour.

Cigarette disposal and the environment

Over 32 billion cigarettes are smoked in Australia each year. If the butts from these cigarettes were placed end to end, they would circle the planet 16 times.

Litter caused by cigarettes butts is a significant problem in Australia. Nearly 7 BILLION cigarette butts are not disposed of properly in Australia every year. Consequently nearly 7% of bushfires, which are responsible for 14 deaths each year, are caused by carelessly discarded burning cigarette butts.³

The Poisons Information Centre received 61 calls from January – September 2005 from parents whose toddlers had been exposed (possible swallowing or placing butts in mouths) to cigarette butts.⁴

References:

- Clean Up Australia, Media Release 2005.
<http://www.cleanup.com.au/main.asp?RequestType=MediaReleaseIn&SubRequestType=Detail&MediaRelID=228>
- Kidsafe WA, Poisons, Lock Up and Away, Fact Sheet, 2005.