

What's in a cigarette?

Tobacco is grown and sold by many different countries. The largest producers of tobacco are China, USA, the former Soviet States, Brazil and India.

Cigarettes are made from the dried leaves of the tobacco plant. The leaves of the tobacco plant are dried by burning trees in ovens. One hectare of trees is needed to dry every hectare of tobacco. That is nearly 5 million hectares of forest each year. When a person smokes they contribute to damaging the environment and they are also damaging their health.

After the leaves of the tobacco plant have been dried they are treated with many different chemicals. Cigarette smoke contains over 4000 chemicals and many of them cause cancer.

When someone smokes a cigarette, they breathe in:

Tar – a black, sticky substance that contains many poisonous chemicals such as: ammonia (found in floor and window cleaner), toluene (found in industrial solvents) and acetone (found in paint stripper and nail polish remover). Tar is the main cause of throat and lung cancer. Tar also causes the yellowish brown stains on smokers' fingers, teeth and lung tissue and on the ceilings in rooms where people smoke heavily.

Nicotine – the drug in tobacco which contributes to addiction to cigarette smoking. Nicotine is poisonous

and has a number of effects on the body. These include: stimulating the nervous system, increasing heart rate, raising blood pressure and making the small blood vessels under the skin shrink, which can cause wrinkles.

Carbon Monoxide – a poisonous gas that reduces the amount of oxygen taken up by a person's red blood cells. This means less oxygen goes to organs of the body and the heart has to work harder.

Hydrogen Cyanide – the poison used in gas chambers during World War II. It damages the tiny hairs which act as natural 'lung cleaners' in our bodies. As a result, toxic substances can build up in the lungs.

Metals – lead, nickel, arsenic (white ant poison) and cadmium (used in car batteries) are among the many metals found in tobacco smoke.

Radioactive Compounds – are found in cigarettes and cause cancer.

Pesticides – such as DDT, methoprene (found in flea powder) are used in growing tobacco. Other chemicals such as benzene (found in petrol) and naphthalene (found in mothballs) are added when the cigarettes are being made.

Smoking is the largest cause of preventable deaths in the western world. The more cigarettes a person smokes the greater the risk of harm to their body. The chemicals in cigarettes can also harm people who don't smoke by them inhaling second hand smoke.

