

Government explores next steps to clean up tobacco litter in England

Tobacco companies may have to pay for the litter created by cigarettes under plans being explored by ministers to protect the environment and save local councils money.

The move comes after fresh evidence reveals that cleaning up littered cigarette butts currently costs UK local authorities around £40 million per year. Despite smoking rates being at their lowest recorded level, cigarette filters continue to be the most commonly littered item in England.

Among the options being looked at by Ministers is a regulatory extended producer responsibility scheme for cigarette butts in England, a new power currently being legislated for in the [Environment Bill](#). This would require the tobacco industry to pay the full disposal costs of tobacco waste products, ensuring the sector takes sufficient financial responsibility for the litter its products create.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Cigarette butts are a blight on our communities, littering our streets or ending up washed down the drain and polluting our rivers and oceans.

We must all take action to protect our environment. We are committed to making sure that the tobacco industry plays its part. That is why we are exploring how cigarette companies can be held fully accountable for the unsightly scourge of litter created by their products.

Public Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

We are making excellent progress in our ambition to be a smoke-free country by 2030, with smoking rates at a record low.

While this is making a substantial impact on the public health of the country, the environmental impact of smoking due to cigarette butt and package littering is still a major issue.

We will continue to look into further ways we can reduce the burden tobacco has on our health and our streets, both through the tobacco control plan, due to be published later this year, and the Environment Bill.

The best action anyone can take is to quit and to help you do that there is plenty of support and advice available.

According to Keep Britain Tidy research, smoking related litter is the most prevalent form of litter in England, making up 68% of all littered items and found on around 80% of surveyed sites.

The vast majority of cigarette butts are single-use plastic and contain hundreds of toxic chemicals once smoked. Littered cigarette filters can persist in the environment for many years and release these chemicals to air, land and water, harming plant growth and wildlife.

As set out in the [Litter Strategy for England](#), the most effective way to tackle smoking related litter is by reducing the prevalence of smoking in the first place. The Government is committed to addressing the harms from smoking and will publish a new tobacco control plan for England later this year to deliver its ambition of a smoke-free country by 2030.

The Environment Bill will allow us to legislate for extended producer responsibility schemes, which could be applied to tobacco products. Cigarette and tobacco product packaging is already covered by the proposed packaging producer responsibility scheme, which is currently undergoing a [second phase of consultation](#).

At the [September roundtable on Smoking Related Litter](#), Minister Pow encouraged parties to consider whether a non-regulatory producer responsibility scheme could be developed for tobacco waste products. Having considered further evidence, the Government has decided that a regulatory approach may be required to ensure that the industry takes sufficient financial responsibility for the litter created by its products and to prevent them from undermining public health policy.

Further research will be undertaken to consider the next steps to tackle smoking-related litter. The Government will continue to work closely with charities, tobacco product manufacturers and associated trade bodies to address the issue.

The announcement forms the latest step in the Government's fight against single-use plastics to protect our environment and clean up our oceans. In its war against plastic pollution, the Government has already [banned microbeads in rinse-off personal care products](#) and [prohibited the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds in England](#). The [highly successful charge on single-use plastic bags](#) will be [expanded to all retailers and increased to 10p from April](#), and a [world-leading plastic packaging tax](#) will be introduced from April 2022 for products which do not have at least 30% recycled content. Last week, we outlined our next steps to introduce a [deposit return scheme](#) to incentivise consumers to recycle more.