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## Toxic butts



I always knew cigarette butts were nasty, but now it seems they're even worse than I thought. New research -- albeit funded by anti-cigarette groups -- suggests they could qualify as toxic hazardous waste.

The research comes from San Diego State University (SDSU); the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), and consulting groups Oxford Outcomes and the Varda Group. It's part of the Cigarette Butt Pollution Project funded by the California Tobacco Related Disease Research Program of the University of California.

Their findings are being presented Monday at the 137th annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, held in Philadelphia.

Meanwhile, here's a preview of the findings and project activities, provided by San Diego State University:

- According to SDSU Public Health Professor Richard Gersberg, cigarette butts allowed to soak in both fresh and salt water kill half the exposed fish in a standardized hazard assessment at a concentration of about one butt per liter. Further research is planned to identify the organic and inorganic chemicals in the cigarette butt that are lethal to fish and may be identified in natural environments.

- The tobacco industry fears an alliance among environmental and tobacco control groups that would demand that the industry take responsibility for discarded cigarette butts, according to Elizabeth Smith, associate adjunct professor at UCSF. Smith studied tobacco industry documents and found that, to avoid this

responsibility, tobacco companies developed numerous anti-litter efforts. However, the companies' own research revealed that smokers litter cigarette butts for complex reasons, including disgust at the butts and guilt about their addiction, and industry programs have had little success at changing smoker littering behavior.

- Richard Barnes, of the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education, described regulatory policies that may help reduce cigarette butt waste. These include levying litter fees on tobacco products, strengthening the enforcement of existing penalties for illegally disposing of cigarette butts and possibly bringing lawsuits against the industry to recover costs to communities of cigarette butt blight and butt cleanups.
- An economic study based on a litter audit in San Francisco found the annual cost to dispose of cigarette butts was more than \$6 million. Dr. John Schneider of Oxford Outcomes said this justified the imposition by the City Council of a litter fee of 20 cents per pack of cigarettes sold in San Francisco.
- Finally, Clifton Curtis, of the Varda Group, described how an alliance of environmental and tobacco control groups and other supporters might develop an innovative public information and advocacy campaign to reduce cigarette butt waste at the local, state, and national levels.

The project ([www.cigwaste.org](http://www.cigwaste.org)) seeks to unify its environmental efforts against butt waste with public health efforts against smoking.