

# LITTER IN AMERICA

Results from the nation's largest litter study

## KEY FINDINGS: CIGARETTE BUTT LITTER

Cigarette butts are the most frequently littered item. Tobacco products comprise 38% of all U.S. roadway litter and 30% at "transition points," places where smokers much discontinue smoking before proceeding. As part of Keep America Beautiful's 2009 Littering Behavior in America\* research, specific data was gathered about cigarette butt littering. This included observations of smokers at recreation areas, bars/restaurants, retail, and medical/hospitals.

### THE OVERALL LITTERING RATE FOR CIGARETTE BUTTS IS 65%.

This is slightly higher than the 58% rate found in the general littering observations.

- When a cigarette butt is littered, dropping with intent is the most frequent behavior or strategy (35%), followed by "flick/fling" (27%), and "stomp" (27%).
- Most cigarette butts are littered on the ground (85%), 37% into bushes/shrubbery, 25% on or around trash receptacles, and 15% into planters.

Table 10. Frequencies of Litter Disposal Strategies for Cigarette Butt Litter

	Frequency	Percentage
Drop with Intent	122	35%
Flick/Fling	94	27%
Stomp	92	27%
Other	17	5%
Bury	9	3%
Wedge	6	2%
Shoot & Miss	3	1%
TOTAL	343	100%

Table 4. Frequencies of Where Cigarette Butts were Littered in Observation Locations

	Frequency	Percentage
Ground	110	85%
Bushes/Shrubbery	48	37%
On or around trash receptacles	32	25%
Planters	20	15%
Other	6	5%

### CIGARETTE BUTT LITTERING IS MORE INFLUENCED BY THE ENVIRONMENT THAN GENERAL LITTERING. ONE OF THE STRONGEST PREDICTORS OF CIGARETTE BUTT LITTERING IS THE NUMBER OF ASH RECEPTACLES.

- 38% of cigarette butt littering is associated with the physical environment, including the number of ash receptacles. The presence of ash receptacles, either as stand-alone, or integrated into a trash can, correlates with lower rates of cigarette butt littering.
- For every additional ash receptacle, the littering rate for cigarette butts decreases by 9%.
- At the time of improper disposal, litterers were an average of 31 feet from an ash receptacle. While trash receptacles are widespread (at 91% of observed sites), ash receptacles are less common, with only 47% of observed sites having an ash only or ash/trash receptacle.
- Of smokers who work, 41.8% report that they do not have receptacles for cigarette butts at their work location.

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## ANOTHER STRONG PREDICTOR OF CIGARETTE BUTT LITTERING IS THE AMOUNT OF EXISTING LITTER.

- **Smokers are more likely to litter if the environment contains any type of litter, not just cigarette butts.** More littered environments encourage more littering.
- **Medical/hospital sites have the highest littering rates,** followed by recreation areas, bars/restaurants, and then retail locations and city centers.

Table 14. Place of Disposal for Cigarette Butt Litter

	Frequency
Pocketed	2
Trash can	8
Ashtray	26
Ground	7
Field Strip	5
Personal Ashtray	2
Cigarette Pack	1

## 63% OF CIGARETTE BUTT LITTERING IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS.

- **Younger adult smokers are more likely to litter cigarette butts than older smokers,** although there is no correlation with gender.
- **Only 14% of current smokers report owning a pocket ashtray,** and 28.1% report that they do not have a receptacle for cigarette butts in their car.
- **77% of individuals in an intercept survey report that they thought cigarette butts were litter.** When asked how they disposed of their cigarette butts when outside, most report using an ashtray. Others report using a trash can or dropping the butt to the ground.

These key research findings indicate that the most effective ways to address cigarette butt littering include **increasing the availability of ash receptacles and portable ashtrays, decreasing the amount of existing litter through clean-up activities, and educating the public with motivational messages that target individual responsibility and obligation.**