



Press release

January 4th 2021

Campaigners call for ban on plastic cigarette filters in Wales

A WELSH charity has joined forces with environmental campaigners to call for a ban on plastic cigarette filters in Wales.

ASH Wales, the Marine Conservation Society and Keep Wales Tidy want the sale of plastic-filled cigarette butts to be banned alongside items such as plastic straws and plastic cotton bud stems.

Welsh Government launched its Reducing Single Use Plastic consultation in July, with proposals to create a law banning the sale of single use plastic items. However, cigarette butts weren't included in the list of items that would be banned.

Cigarettes are the most common form of litter in Wales and pose a huge environmental risk, often ending up in waterways and eventually the ocean after being washed down drains. Each cigarette butt releases thousands of chemicals and microplastics into the environment and takes up to 14 years to degrade. As well as being made of plastic the filters contain a cocktail of lethal chemicals including arsenic, lead and nicotine that endanger the marine animals that often mistake the filters for food. Scientific studies have shown that one cigarette butt left to soak for 96 hours will kill half the fish exposed to it.

In a study carried out by Keep Wales Tidy in 2018, cigarette butts were found on 80.3% of streets in Wales making them the most common form of litter in the country. Despite the impact they have on the environment they are not widely recognised as being part of the plastic problem with less than half of smokers aware that they contain plastic, according to a survey by Keep Britain Tidy.

Year on year, the Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean finds cigarette stubs among the top 5 most common forms of litter on Welsh beaches. In 2019, an average of 33 cigarette stubs was found for every 100 metres of Welsh beach, making them the third most common litter form. This year, cigarette filters were the fifth most common form of litter on Welsh beaches.

Suzanne Cass, CEO of ASH Wales, said: "Cigarette butts are a big part of the plastic pollution problem and should be treated as single use plastic items in exactly the same way as straws, balloon sticks or takeaway coffee cups.

“We have urged Welsh Government to include plastic cigarette filters in the list of items subject to regulatory action in Wales.

“In doing so Welsh Government would not only remove a highly destructive piece of plastic litter from the environment but it would change perceptions of cigarette litters and perhaps even encourage smokers to think about the impact their habit is having on the environment.”

Laura Foster, Head of Clean Seas at the Marine Conservation Society said “Cigarette butts are a worryingly prolific form of litter on beaches and streets in Wales and across the UK. Just like many other single-use items, cigarette filters contain plastic meaning that they don’t degrade easily. Filters also contain some dangerous chemicals which pose a significant threat the environment and marine wildlife. We want plastic cigarette filters to be banned, and a review of other types of filters to help reduce the amount of litter found on our coasts and beaches.”

A Keep Wales Tidy spokesperson said: “Cigarette filters are made of a type of plastic which means they can stay in the environment for up to 15 years! And, because of their small size, cigarette ends are easily transported to our waterways and coast. Everyone needs to be aware that cigarette ends are not biodegradable, are harmful to our health, wildlife and the environment.”

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

Available for interview:

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The Marine Conservation Society campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the Good Fish Guide as well as involving thousands of volunteers in projects and surveys such as MCS Beachwatch. There has been a dedicated MCS Conservation Programme for Scotland operating from an Edinburgh Office established in April 2000. www.mcsuk.org

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ASH Wales Cymru is the leading organisation working for a smokefree Wales via strong tobacco control policy and country-wide campaigns. We work to raise awareness of the health, social and economic effects of smoking by engaging with communities, young people and partners across Wales.

NB: Please refer to ASH Wales Cymru as a 'tobacco control campaign group'

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