

The Filter Fraud:

Banning the sale of filtered cigarettes as a key new strategy for tobacco control

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Background

The elimination of the cigarette filter, which is on 99.7% of cigarettes (sold in U.S.) has been largely overlooked as a tobacco control strategy. The near-universal adoption by smokers of filtered cigarettes since their introduction in the 1950s has not reduced their risks for cancer.

Ninety Years of Filter Fraud

In the 1950s, tobacco companies produced filter tipped brands that claimed to remove certain components of the smoke, which manufacturers never acknowledged to be harmful. This included use of charcoal, asbestos, and other materials. All major medical journals (JAMA, NEJM, BMJ, The Lancet, and many state medical journals) accepted cigarette advertising into the 1950s, and throughout the 1970s the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute, and most major health organizations promoted the concept of a "less hazardous" cigarette.

Evidence that Filters are a Health Hazard

Lung cancer risks among smokers have doubled for men and increased by almost 10 times for women from 1960-1980. Like flavorings such as menthol, cigarette filters facilitate nicotine addiction and make it easier for youth to start smoking. The use of ventilation in cigarette filters has also failed to make them safer and more than likely has made them more harmful.(2,3)

Toxic Tobacco Product Waste

Most cigarette filters are made of cellulose acetate, a non-biodegradable plastic material.(4) The leachates produced by soaking butts for 96 hours in fresh or salt water have a LD50 for test fish of one cigarette butt/liter.(5) According to this study, cigarette butts should therefore be considered toxic hazardous waste. E-cig waste is toxic hazardous waste according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Policy options to eliminate the filter fraud

Rationale

Jurisdiction

Likely Outcome

Product Labelling (8)	Increases smoker awareness of filter risk	National	Modest impact on smoker behavior
Litigation (9)	Cost recovery for environmental damage, nuisance	Local, State, National	De-normalization smoking, internalization of environmental and health costs
Extended Producer Responsibility (10)	Takeback & waste product stewardship	Local, State, National	Higher costs of distribution
Banning Sale of Filtered Cigarettes (3)	Corrective action on fraudulent product, upstream waste management	Local, State, National	De-normalizes smoking, reduced consumption
Public Education (1) & Counter-Advertising (11)	Change perceptions through effective direct messaging	National	Increased public awareness of fraud

Debris collected on beaches (2011)	# of Debris Items	% of Total Debris
1 Cigarettes/filters	52,907,756	32%
2 Wrappers/containers	14,766,533	9%
3 Caps, lids	13,585,425	8%
4 Cups, plates, cutlery	10,112,038	6%
5 Beverage bottles (plastic)	9,549,156	6%
6 Bags (plastic)	7,825,319	5%
7 Beverage bottles (glass)	7,062,199	4%
8 Beverage cans	6,753,260	4%
9 Straws/stirrers	6,263,453	4%
10 Rope	3,251,948	2%

Conclusions

There is sufficient evidence that cigarette filters are a fraud, primarily acting as a marketing tool with which the tobacco industry has deceived the public into believing there is some 'health benefit' from smoking filtered cigarettes. Banning the sale of filtered cigarettes is likely to reduce cigarette consumption, environmental harm, further de-normalize smoking, and result in fewer children starting to smoke.

References, an illustrated version of this poster, and more @ csts.ua.edu/fraud