

litter prevention kit

# CIGARETTE BUTTS



**VICTORIAN LITTER**  
ACTION ALLIANCE

This is one of a series of introductory guides complementing  
VLAA's web site [www.litter.vic.gov.au](http://www.litter.vic.gov.au)

This litter prevention kit has been prepared by the Litter Champion, a program supported by the Victorian Litter Action Alliance (VLAA) and managed by Sustainability Victoria.

Published by



Litter Champion program managed by Sustainability Victoria  
Level 28, 50 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, Victoria 3000 Australia  
Phone: 03 8626 8700 Fax: 03 8639 3077

[www.litter.vic.gov.au](http://www.litter.vic.gov.au)

[litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au](mailto:litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au)

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These materials have been prepared to assist litter management authorities to develop a roadside litter prevention program. While VLAA has worked hard to ensure these materials are as accurate and useful as possible, it does not accept any responsibility for errors or omissions in the materials. Councils and other agencies should seek their own legal advice when investigating or responding to specific incidents.

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200 Victoria Street  
Carlton 3053  
1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842)  
[www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

## About the Victorian Litter Action Alliance

VLAA is the peak body for litter management and prevention in Victoria and aims to provide a coordinated approach to preventing litter across state and local government, industry and community sectors. Each of the Alliance members plays its part in the fight against litter. These members are:



This kit is an abridged edition of the Litter Prevention Kit - Cigarette Butts published by VLAA in 2007.  
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# Cigarette butt litter prevention

## About

This guide won't tell you everything about preventing cigarette butt litter, but it will give readers a snapshot of the circumstances that cause it, and how to tackle it.

If you're serious about running a cigarette butt litter prevention program, read this guide then go to VLAA's website. There you will find the detail you need to develop a program, including resources such as forms, templates, case studies and fact sheets.

## Best practice for litter prevention

VLAA's best practice model for litter prevention is a proven method for planning, implementing and evaluating a litter prevention program.

See the best practice section at the end for an overview of the program model, and to learn about the three key elements that guide successful campaigns – education, infrastructure and enforcement.



## The problem

Cigarette butts are made from cellulose acetate, a form of plastic. They are not made from cotton wool or paper.

Butts are designed to capture vapors from a cigarette, and this contains more than 4000 chemicals, including 43 known carcinogens such as ammonia, nitrogen dioxide, formaldehyde, hydrogen cyanide and arsenic.

These and other toxic chemicals leach into the environment when butts are littered. Animals also ingest butts when mistaken for food.

In 2007, 21% of men and 18% of women were smokers. Men and women aged 25 to 29 had the highest smoking rates (28%).

## The Litter Champion

The Victorian Litter Action Alliance litter champion program has proven itself a great way to combine our efforts to tackle litter in Victoria. The Litter Champion's role is to help anyone interested in learning about or taking action on litter.

Contact the Litter Champion: t: 03 8626 8700.  
e: [litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au](mailto:litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au)

# Butt statistics

## Cigarette butts are ubiquitous

**4.5 trillion** cigarette butts are littered every year on the whole planet (Cigarette Litter Organisation 2001).

**7.2 billion** cigarette butts are littered annually in Australia (Butt Littering Trust).

**Top 10** – Cigarette butts have made the top ten of items picked up on Clean Up Australia Day since 1990.

**58%** – Cigarette butt proportion of all items littered in public places around Australia Community Change 2001. (Littering Behaviour Study III for BIEC).

**33%** – The butt proportion of the one billion litter items per year finding their way into Melbourne's waterways (Melbourne Water).

**10%** – Proportion of discarded butts entering Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne Water).

**90%** – Of the EPA litter report line fines issued in 2000-01, 90% were for cigarette butts.

**1 hour** – The time it takes for chemicals to leach from cigarette butts when in contact with water.

**1200** – The number of grass fires attributed to cigarettes in a year in NSW.

**Toxic** – As the acetate filter in a cigarette butt starts to decompose, it releases toxic chemicals into the environment.

**Lifetime** – Estimates of how long butts take to break down vary greatly. One measurement for butts in seawater gave a figure of 36 months or longer (Clean Up Australia 1997; NSW EPA 2001).

**Leaching** – The chemicals that leach from cigarette butts into waterways are toxic to small crustaceans and bacteria at concentrations as low as one cigarette butt per 40 litres. This persists for at least seven days.



# Laws and enforcement

## Community Concern

No one likes to see litter around the place, and since almost 80% of the population do not smoke, you will find a great deal of support for an anti butt littering campaign, and prosecuting those who don't do the right thing.

## Visible enforcement

High profile enforcement activities are an essential part of litter prevention programs.

The role of enforcement is not just to prosecute. When venue operators know they will be checked for compliance, and smokers know that they may be fined for littering butts in public places, enforcement plays its educational role as well.

Signs and butt bins alone will not curb the problem in cigarette butt hotspots.

## Local laws

Councils can use regulations to help combat butt litter, for example trading permits may include a requirement to provide windproof or fixed cigarette butt receptacles.

Enforcement of these regulations will have the knock on effect of making more butt infrastructure available in places of gathering.

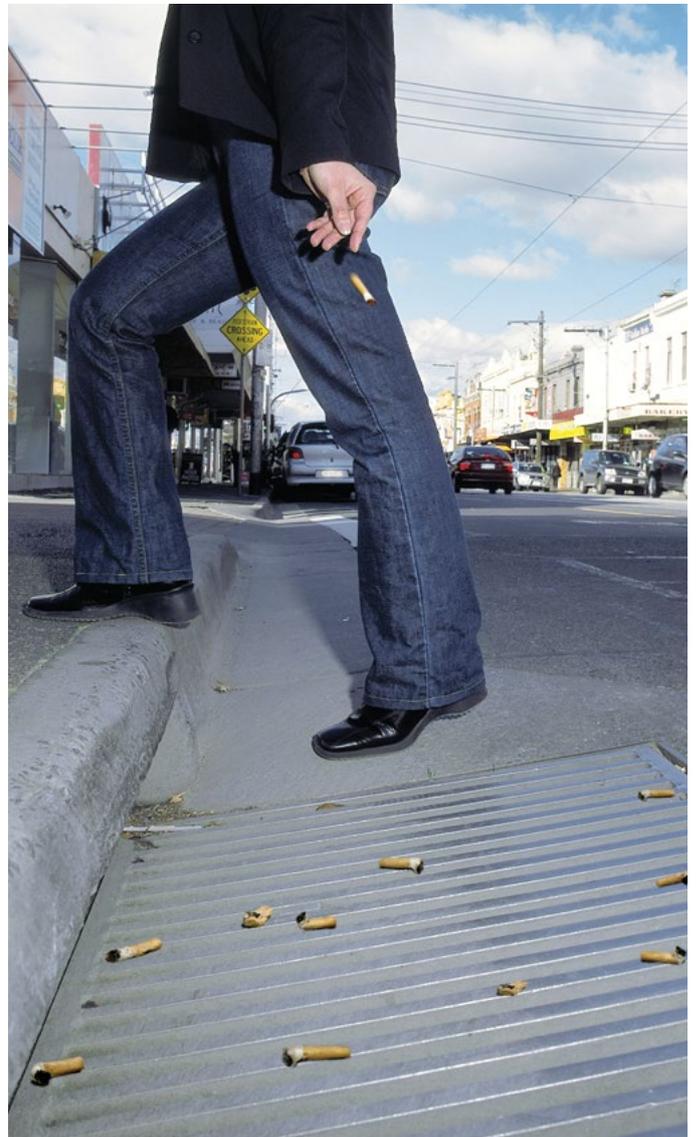
## EPA Victoria

The EPA's **Litter Report Line** is available for anyone to use.

Those witnessing littering from vehicles can report it and enables a prosecution. Local governments can set up their own mechanisms similar to the EPA's.

EPA's **Litter Enforcement Toolkit** provides a thorough guide to the litter provisions in the *Environment Protection Act 1970*.

Visit [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au).



# Butt bins

Many smokers blame their littering behaviour on a lack of well designed and placed bins, with many saying they would use a butt bin if it was nearby and convenient.

## Wall mounted butt bins

These are permanently installed and come in a variety of shapes and capacities.

Place them at litter hotspots, and if possible test the proposed type to ensure it is right for the context. Best locations are at entrances and exits, and where people gather.

Often, wall or pole mounted butt bins provide a place for signage or advertising. There is an opportunity to educate smokers how to use the bins properly.



## Wind proof ashtrays

These sit on a bench or table generally in outdoor drinking and dining areas. Many varieties are available and these can also be personalised with a logo or message.

Many Victorian councils require premises to provide windproof ashtrays for outdoor dining or entertainment areas.



## Mobile butt bins

Mobile butt bins have a similar capacity as wall mounted types, but they have the bonus of move ability, e.g. at an event or event venue.



## Personal ashtrays

These small ashtrays are designed for people to carry in their bags or pockets.

They are reusable and come in different shapes and materials. They can also be personalised with a logo or a message.

Many smokers may be unaware of their existence, but when shown samples they tend to be interested and can supplement your campaign.

Some research indicates personal ashtrays may become litter if used as a giveaway without appropriate education. Don't let that discourage you though.



# Smoking areas

The legislative reforms banning smoking in enclosed places pushed smokers outside to smoke, often with no facilities or education to manage the litter.

To deal with this, many councils use permit conditions requiring businesses to provide windproof ashtrays or have a butt litter receptacle.

The litter prevention program may focus on designated smoking areas, or the informal smoking areas that appear outside office buildings and workplaces.

The partnerships to deal with each will be different. In the latter case, only individuals can be held accountable, even though the organisations and their workplace cultures may be part of the problem.

## Designated smoking areas

Some points to consider if you are creating a designated smoking area from scratch.

- Find a space that will be comfortable to smokers and conveniently located.
- There is little use in providing an area that is aesthetically unappealing or too far away – it won't be used.
- Make sure the location will not interfere with the building's air-conditioning.
- Install seating or shade to make the area more comfortable.
- Install appropriate signage, and try to reward those who use the smoking area appropriately.



## About smokers

Research conducted some time back characterised some prevalent behaviours and attitudes among smokers.

- Six out of ten Australian smokers litter their butts when outdoors.
- Smokers do not view butts as litter in the way they see papers, wrappers, cans, bottles and other items as litter.
- Many smokers do not realise or believe that littering their cigarette butts has an environmental impact or is an inappropriate behaviour.
- Many smokers believe butts are relatively insignificant in the overall problem, thinking it is easily eliminated.
- Throwing a butt on the ground is an ingrained habit~with many.
- Smokers are more likely to be careful with butts in more natural environments, beaches, parks and gardens.
- Over half of smokers researched would consider changing their behaviour on the basis of the potential environmental impact.
- Smokers do take notice, and many say their habits are unlikely to change unless there's enforcement - the hip pocket is a powerful influence.

**References** - Beverage Industry Environment Council - *Community Change 2001*. Keep Australia Beautiful National Association - *McGregor Marketing 1998*.

# Communication and partnerships

## Council and organisation

Involve all parts of the council that have a role in or are affected by the butt program.

- Number one – local laws officers.
- Waste and street cleaning managers, who clean the streets and empty the bins.
- Parks and open spaces – do they have the appropriate bins?
- Planning and approving new developments – do they include areas for dogs & bins?
- Engineering – who buys and maintains the bins.
- Public relations and communications is the topic on their radar?
- Is there a councillor or VIP with a passion for fighting cigarette butts?
- Customer service staff that may be at the brunt of complaints about butt litter.
- Executive management and cross departmental planning teams.
- Consider setting up a litter action task force.

## Agencies

Tackling roadside litter requires collaboration with some key agencies, not least of all those responsible for the places people smoke.

There needs to be a clear understanding across the agencies of the process of managing butt litter, and educational messages and need to be aligned with other agencies' communications.

## Adopt a Roadside

To involve broad sections of the community, Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria provides the 'Adopt a Roadside' program.



Businesses, community groups and other interested parties literally adopt a roadside and keep it litter free and in good care. Adopt A Roadside information can be found at [www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/kabv](http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/kabv)

## Target Audiences

As with all litter prevention campaigns, engagement with your target audiences will determine the nature of your communications plan, what promotions and media you conduct, your key messages in media and signage, use of events and launches, and so on.

This also helps plan for the most suitable infrastructure and enforcement components in the litter prevention plan.

Clearly, smokers themselves are the target for behaviour change and taking responsibility.

Other audiences that may assist with cigarette butt related campaigns include related businesses such as tobacconists and retailers of smoking products, and hospitality and entertainment business such as nightclubs, RSL clubs, restaurants and pubs.



## Traders

Every litter prevention campaign should also target local traders, either to be supporters and advocates, or as the target for taking action – in the case of cigarette butts, both of these motivations may apply.

Working with local traders to run a butt litter prevention program is important, and you are likely to get their cooperation. For you, traders can promote key messages for your program, and provide program materials to customers.

Traders too want clean roadsides – clean is good for business.

# Communication and partnerships

## Community engagement

Community engagement – speaking with and interacting with people - is the key ingredient to any litter campaign, backed up with information, communications by print and web, media, events, incentives and special promotions.

These are the platforms we use for education, and changing peoples' littering behaviour, and getting intelligence from the ground.

You may be targeting smokers with the message, but they do constitute around 20% of the population, with the highest rates amongst people in their 20s.

In general though, the community is behind you, and you should not have a problem in finding partners and participants in the campaign.

## Butt campaigns

A few considerations if embarking on a campaign:

- **Tone** – Education campaigns should not be condescending - they should make the link between littering butts and the environmental harm.
- **Message** – Highly visual advertising and promotion that explains the size and consequences of the problem work best.
- **Community support** – Research consistently shows that the community agrees with litterers being fined.

## Key messages

The key messages for litter prevention are similar for all types, but should include these, localised in some way if possible.

- Keep your butts to yourself until you can dispose of it properly.
- Littering is illegal and should be reported.
- Litterers can be reported using EPA's pollution line.

## Incentives

Incentives are the gentle 'persuaders' to change behaviours. The idea is for the individual or organisation to take responsibility for cigarette butts, whether they are the victims or the perpetrators.

Some examples:

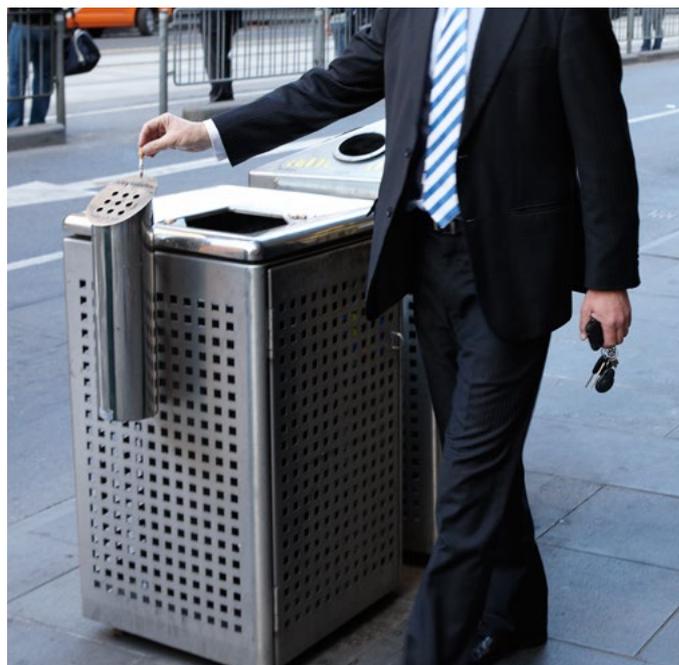
- Providing smokers with free personal ashtrays.
- Providing venues with free windproof ashtrays and signage.
- Assisting office and company managers to deal with butts outside their establishments.
- Conducting staff campaigns in your own organisation, or helping other workplaces do the same.

## More information

A wealth of information about smoking and cigarette butts can be found at the following:

**Butt Free Australia** – [www.buttfree.org.au](http://www.buttfree.org.au) – Your one stop shop for information about butt littering.

**Quit** – <http://www.quit.org.au> - information about cigarettes, quitting and smoking rates.



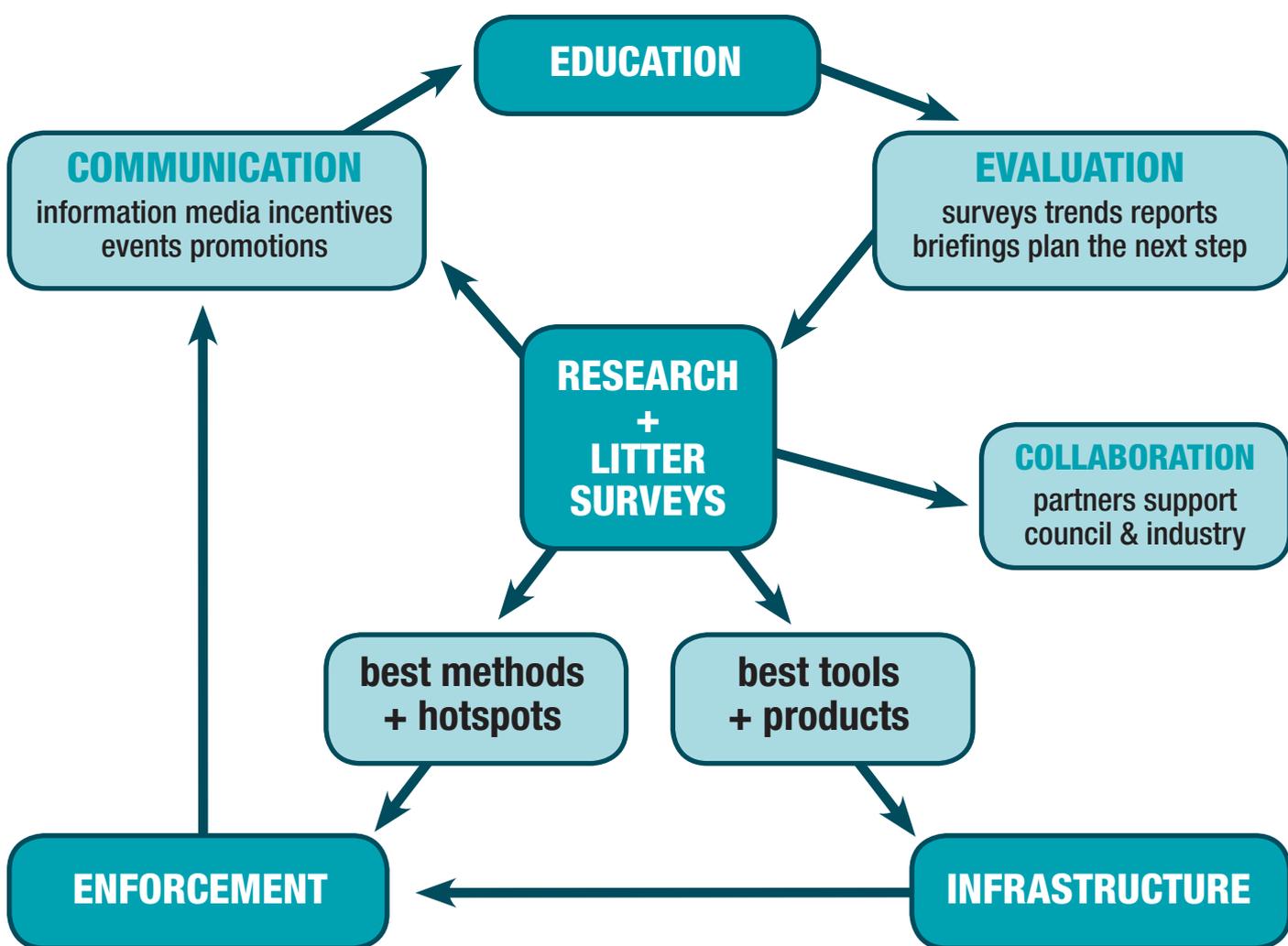
# Best practice in litter prevention

## VLAA best practice programming model

For any litter and waste prevention program, the three key elements of education, infrastructure and enforcement are central to success.

These underpin the other components of best practice – research, incentives, working together, good communication, and to complete the loop, monitoring and evaluation.

VLAA developed its best practice programming model in 2007 to set a consistent standard for planning a litter reduction program.



# Best practice in litter prevention

## AT THE VERY START

### 1. Research – understand the problem

You need to be fully versed in existing knowledge about behaviours, impacts and proven tactics for litter prevention, as well as understanding the characteristics of the location and behaviours you are targeting.

You also need to establish on-the-ground base line information, i.e. carry out litter counts and surveys, and then periodically repeat the exercise.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### 2. Education – explaining the problem

Education is our most powerful tool for achieving long-term change in the community. It can change peoples' motivations and build their capacity to do the right thing. The aim is to imbed a way of thinking – "I know how to, I want to, and I know what the benefits are".

### 3. Enforcement – reinforcing the message

Enforcement is not just about catching and prosecuting people. Public knowledge that littering laws are being enforced and will result in fines and possibly public shame is what makes this component work. But of course, enforcement must also actually happen, not simply be promoted.

### 4. Infrastructure – the tools of change

Making it easy for people to 'do the right thing' by establishing physical infrastructure is another key to long-term behaviour change and reducing litter. Infrastructure can include appropriate bins, signage and as part of the enforcement equation, surveillance cameras and 'under investigation' barrier tape.

### 5. Incentives – persuading people to change their behaviour

Rewards, privileges and other incentives are a powerful way to encourage people to dispose of their waste appropriately and responsibly.

### 6. Working together – support and collaboration

Working in a coordinated manner within your council or organisation, engaging with the local community, and gaining the cooperation and support of key sectors such as business and traders, goes hand in hand with litter prevention. This starts at the beginning when planning a program, and will be the key ingredient for sustainable success.

### 7. Good communication – every step of the way

A strong communications plan publicising each phase of your program helps build support in the community, and is another avenue for educational messages. Communication within your teams, with partners and your own senior management is also important to maintain this essential 'back room' support throughout.

## THE LOOP

### 8. Monitoring and evaluation – what have we achieved?

Monitoring the program during and after implementation tells you how well the litter reduction program is going, based on the base lines established at the beginning, and the targets you set yourself.

This forms the basis for 'doing it again', but with the hindsight of considerable experience.

**litter prevention kit**

# **CIGARETTE BUTTS**

This kit is presented as an introduction. Always go to the VLAA web site [www.litter.vic.gov.au](http://www.litter.vic.gov.au) for full details and resources for running a litter prevention program. Please contact the Litter Champion [litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au](mailto:litterchampion@sustainability.vic.gov.au) or phone 03 8626 8700 for more assistance.

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