

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency
Public Health Division



Tobacco Product Waste: A Public Policy Roadmap

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Project Director, Tobacco Education and Prevention

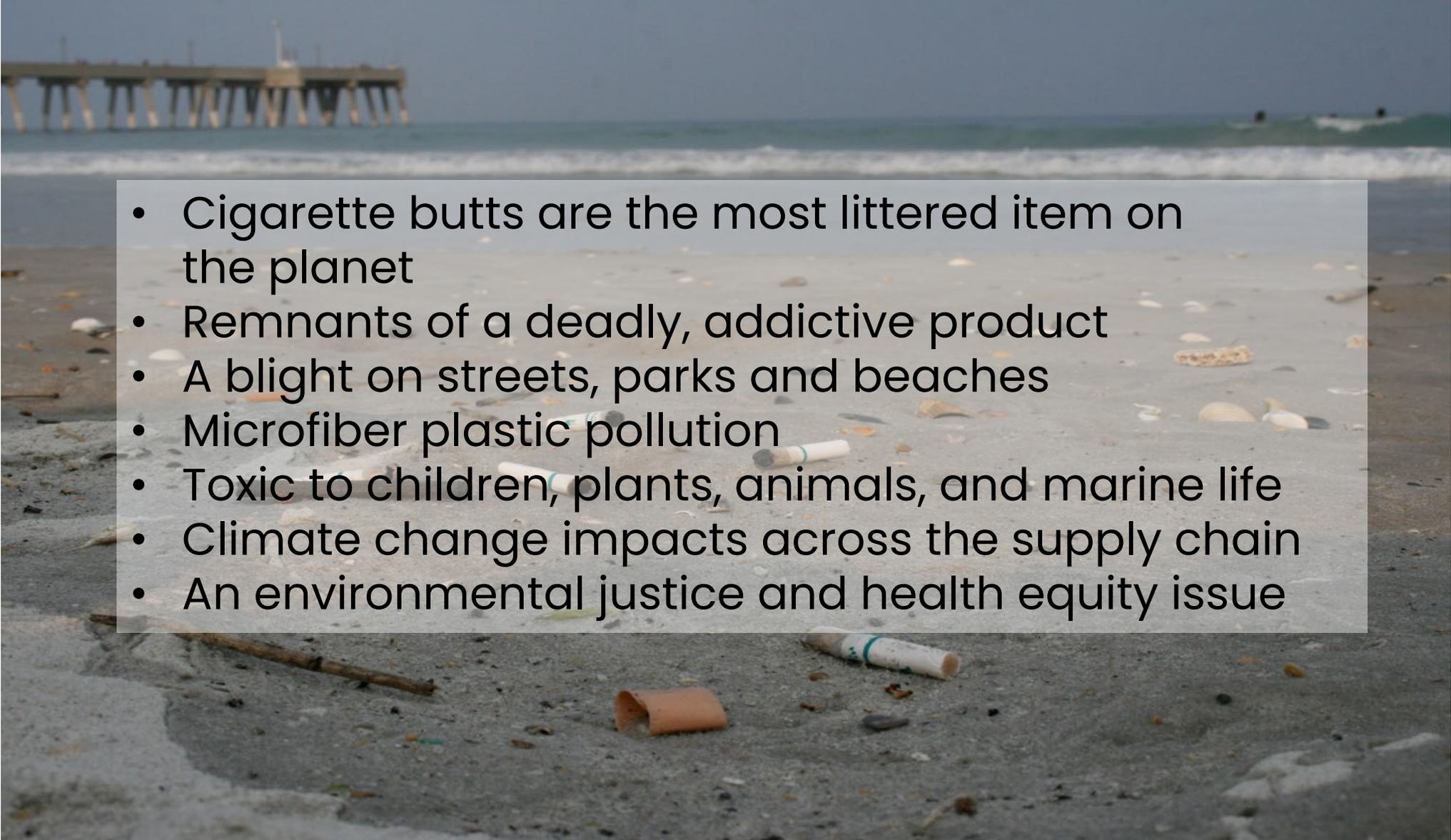
Santa Clara Valley Zero Litter Initiative
November 7, 2025

Santa Cruz, California: Surf City USA



- Coastal California community
- Home of UC Santa Cruz
- Population: 259,432
 - Non-Hispanic White (63%)
 - Hispanic/Latino (36%)
- Five jurisdictions
- Passionate Tobacco Education Coalition (TEC) leaders and members
- Early adopters of tobacco-related policies (TRL, flavored tobacco sales bans, smoke-free parks, etc.)

TPW: A public health and environmental threat

- 
- Cigarette butts are the most littered item on the planet
 - Remnants of a deadly, addictive product
 - A blight on streets, parks and beaches
 - Microfiber plastic pollution
 - Toxic to children, plants, animals, and marine life
 - Climate change impacts across the supply chain
 - An environmental justice and health equity issue

Filters don't even work!

According to the World Health Organization cigarette filters have “no benefit in preventing the adverse health effects of smoking.”

According to a 1958 internal memo, Philip Morris scientists recognized that “selective filtration of particulate phase smoke is a thermodynamic impossibility.”



<https://merg.sdsu.edu/tpwww/>

O'Keefe AE. Selective filtration. September 16, 1958. Philip Morris records; Master Settlement Agreement. Available: <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/hhpb0122>

Big Tobacco takes no responsibility



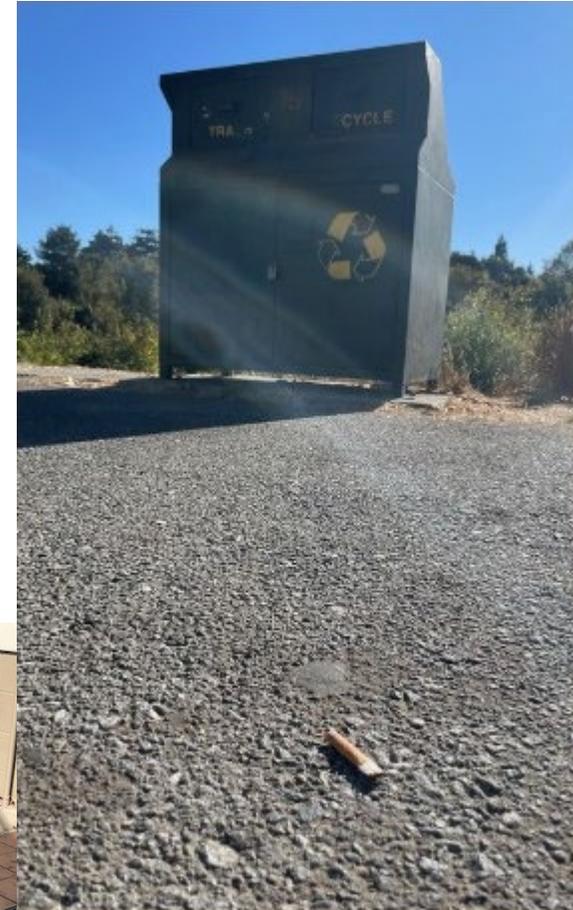
The tobacco industry externalizes their costs, forcing the physical and financial burden of tobacco waste onto government agencies and volunteer organizations.

Current efforts rely on “downstream” solutions

- Garbage cans
- No smoking signs
- Education campaigns
- Litter enforcement

Focus on
Individual
Behavior
Change

Instead of
Policy and
Systems
Change



Local Facilitators

- Clear local TPW data
- Intersection of Public Health and Environmental Health
- Passionate tobacco coalition leadership
- Strong environmental advocates
- Engaged youth
- Political champions
- State-wide technical support

Barriers

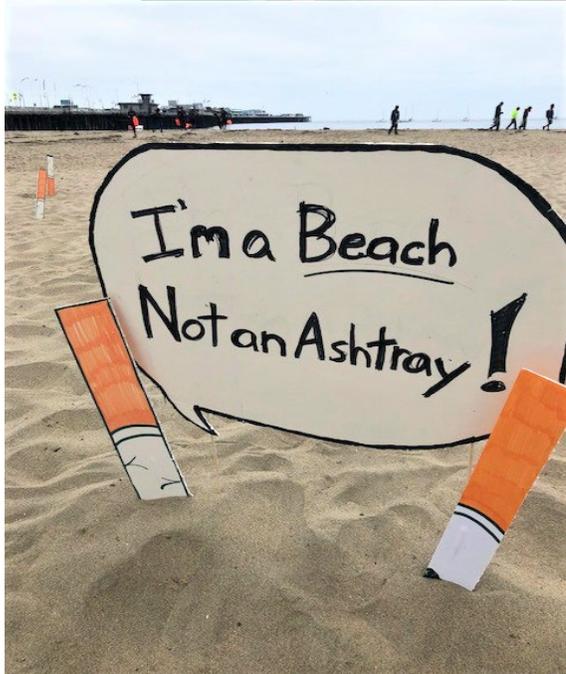
- Misinformation about filters' lack of health benefits
- Need to create new tools and resources
- Need to build cross-jurisdictional coalition
- Retailer resistance
- Financial concerns
- Social norms about smoking and one's "right" to flick butts

TPW Policy Roadmap

Theoretical Framework: Community Organizing through which community groups are supported to identify a problem, mobilize resources, and implement strategies to reach a collective goal.

Community Assessment	Education and Outreach	Data Collection	Policy Development
Communities of Excellence Assessment	Tabling, Presentations, Cleanup Events, Art Activities	Tobacco Waste Assessments	One-on-One Meetings with Policy Makers
Key Informant Interviews	Paid and Earned Media	Tobacco Retail Store Observations	Public Policy Meetings
Public Opinion Polling	Materials Development and Dissemination	Public Policy Meeting Observation Forms	Technical Assistance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From State-wide TA Providers (PHLC) • To Policy Makers
Identify Community Partners	Speakers Bureau	Relevant State and National Data	Support from Community Advocates

Public Health began TPW education in 2017



Identify nontraditional partners

Public Works/Water Quality
Waste Management
City Beautification Groups
Youth Groups
Schools (work with TUPE)

Surfing Groups
Conservation Organizations
Environmental Education Orgs
Museums, zoos, aquariums



Santa Cruz
Museum of
Art & History
at the McPherson Center



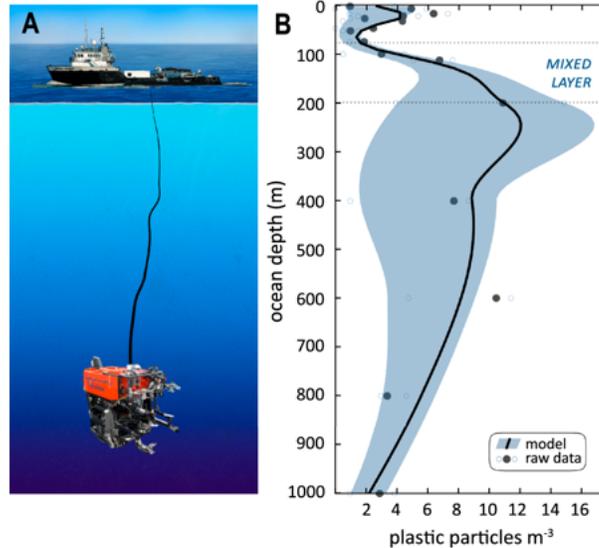
SANTA CRUZ
COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION
DR. FARIS SABBAH • SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ DEPARTMENT OF
Public WORKS

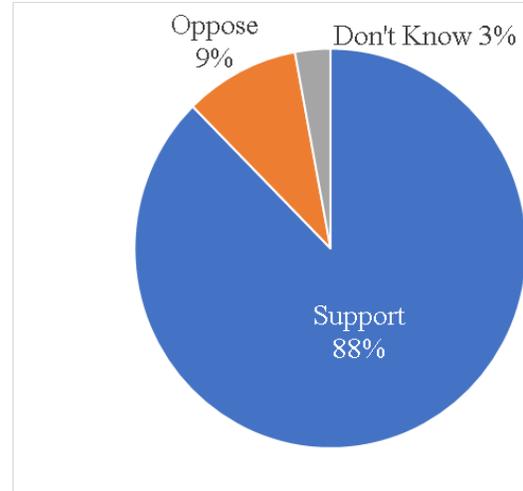
THE CIGARETTE SURFBOARD



Take a data- and science-driven approach



MBARI The vertical distribution and biological transport of marine microplastics across the epipelagic and mesopelagic water column, *Scientific Reports*, 9, 7843,



Tobacco Control

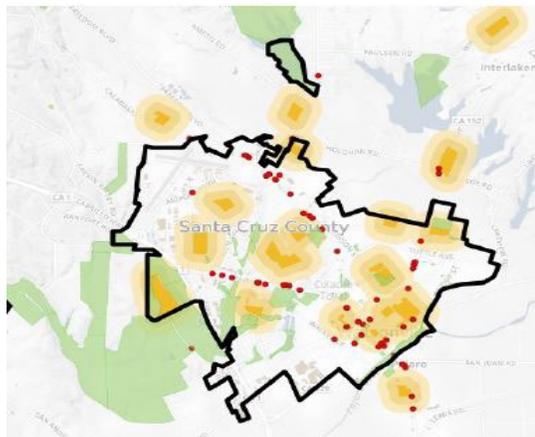
Visit this Journal **BMJ**

▶ Tob Control. 2002 Mar;11(Suppl 1):i40-i50. doi: [10.1136/tc.11.suppl_1.i40](https://doi.org/10.1136/tc.11.suppl_1.i40)

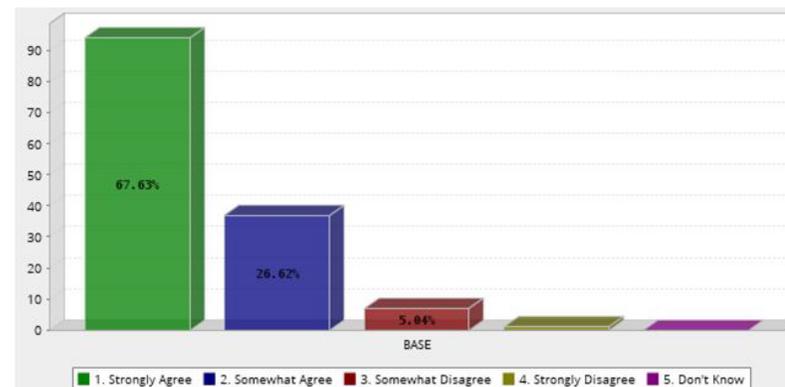
Cigarette filter ventilation is a defective design because of misleading taste, bigger puffs, and blocked vents

[L Kozlowski, R O'Connor](#)

Watsonville Tobacco Retailers CCHAT



Q2. Cigarette butts and other tobacco litter are a problem in your community.



Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

MARINE DEBRIS ON SANCTUARY SHORELINES
An assessment of activities contributing to marine debris, categories and composition, spatial distribution, and predictor variables.

All marine debris comes from people and can threaten wildlife. It can enter waterways and the ocean from land through littering, poor waste management practices, storm water discharge, and extreme natural events.

DATA ANALYZED

- 5 CITIZEN SCIENCE data sets
- 4,725 SURVEY POINTS
- 7 HUMAN ACTIVITIES
- 41 debris categories

RESULTS

- 3 activities contributed to 95% of marine debris
- VARIOUS* 42.5%
- 27.9% EATING and DRINKING
- SMOKING 24.5%

* Items not attributed to a specific human activity because they were small unidentified plastic, glass, or metal fragments or could have originated from multiple activities.
PLASTIC FRAGMENTS, CIGARETTE BUTTS, and WRAPPERS contributed to 59% of marine debris categories by count.

SURVEY SPAN

- 276 shoreline miles divided into
- 9 mile segments
- 5 year period from 2017-2021
- COLLECTED BY 37,000 volunteers

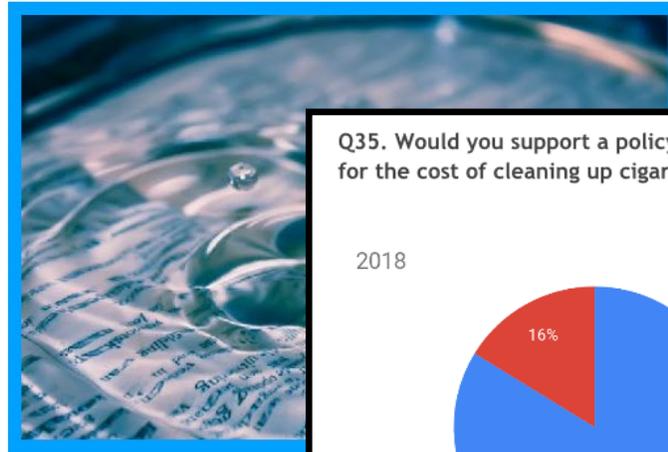
Collaborate with Public Works

In 2018, Public Works added questions about tobacco waste to their stormwater awareness survey.

Respondents expressed strong support (84%) for a policy that holds tobacco companies responsible for the cost of cleaning up cigarette litter.

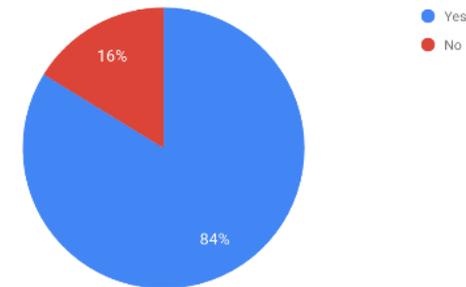
2018

Consolidated Santa Cruz County and Cities Stormwater Awareness and Behaviors Results Summary



Q35. Would you support a policy that holds tobacco companies responsible for the cost of cleaning up cigarette litter?

2018



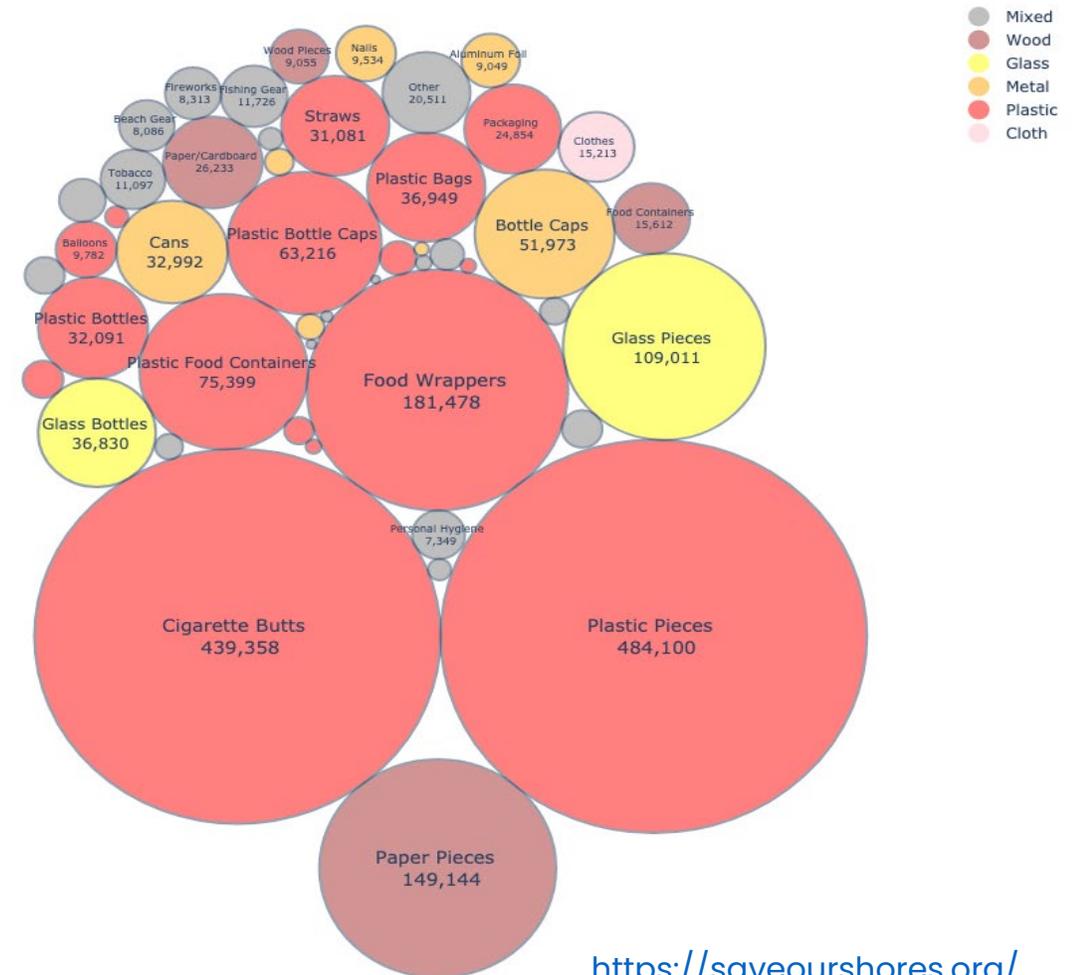
	2018
Yes	966
No	187
Answers	1153
Skips	13

Respondents expressed strong support (84%) for a policy that holds tobacco companies responsible for the cost of cleaning up cigarette litter.

Save Our Shores Cleanup Data

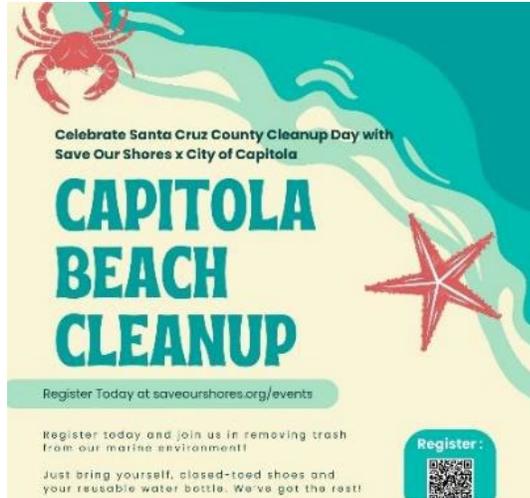
Number of Debris Items Collected By Category and Material 2013-2023

In just ten years, Save Our Shores volunteers have collected almost half a million cigarette butts during local cleanup events.



<https://saveourshores.org/>

Cleanups engage the public, attract media, and gather local data

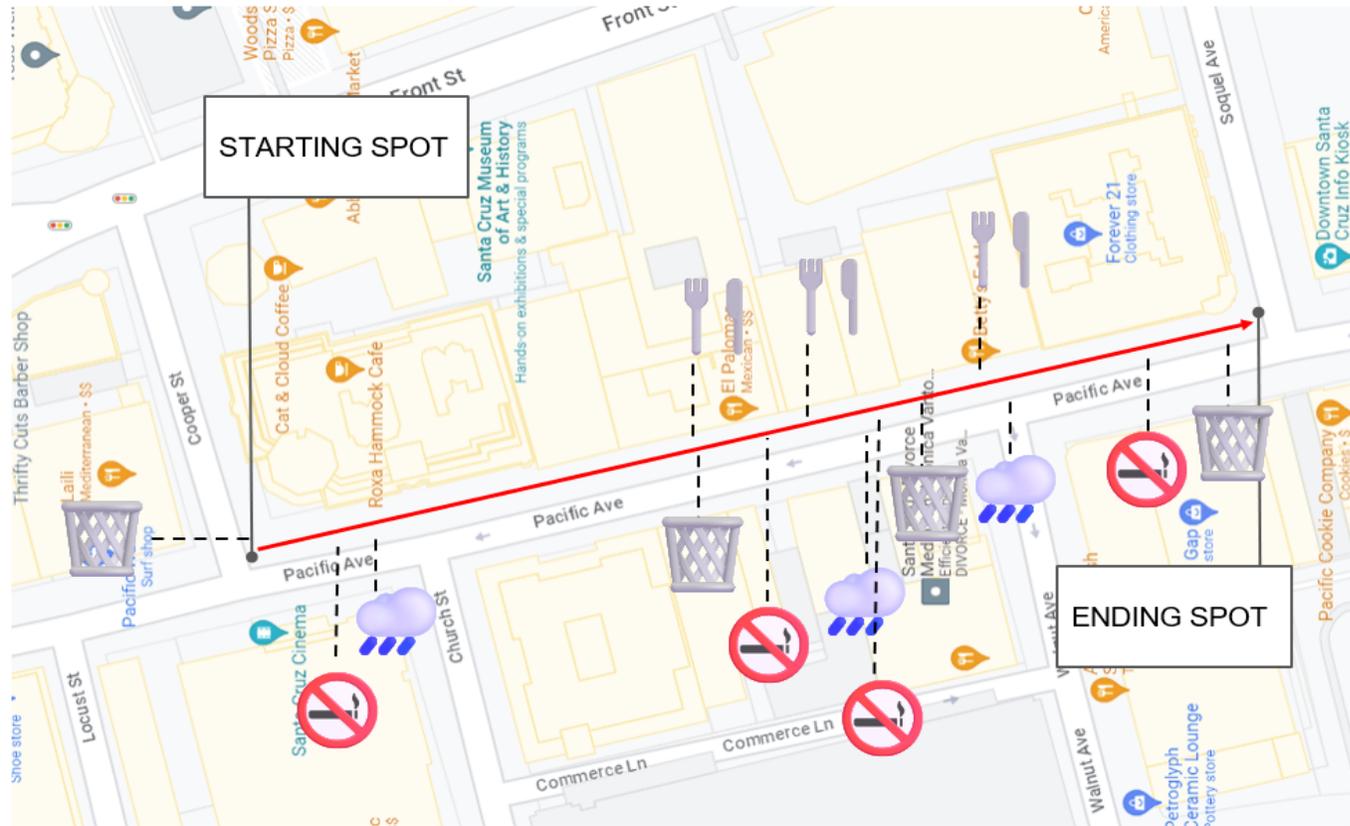


THINGS TO DO

Coast Line: Aug. 26 beach cleanup in Santa Cruz targets cigarette butts



TPW Assessment Mapping



Site 1: Downtown Santa Cruz (Pacific Ave between Locust St and Soquel Ave)
Length: 720 ft. Width: 32 ft. Area: 23040 ft/sq

Has: 4 No Smoking Signs, 4 Garbage Cans, 3 Storm Drains, 3 Outdoor Dining

iKickButts Data Collection Tool

- Take images and count tobacco product waste while mapping where you find it.
- Share images and observations on social media with elected officials, community leaders, and academic researchers.
- Create customized reports including maps and tables.
- Use community science data to advocate for more comprehensive tobacco control policies.



[Home - iKickButts](#)

Public Opinion Polling

- The City of Santa Cruz conducted a bilingual TPW survey in 2023.
- They found that 90.6% of respondents would support policies that reduce tobacco litter.
- Prohibiting the sale of single-use cigarette filters was the top policy choice for survey respondents.
- [SC City Tobacco Waste Survey](#)

TAKE SURVEY



CLICK HERE

As part of this effort, the City Council is exploring a range of potential policies, such as:

[Tobacco Product Waste en Espanol](#)

Prohibit the sale of all single use tobacco products

Prohibit the sale of all single use cigarette filters

Prohibit the sale of Electronic Smoking Devices (ESD)

Prohibit the sale of single use ESD.

Prohibit the sale of tobacco products that create plastic waste (e.g., lighters, packaging, cigar tips, etc.)

Require hazardous waste tracking, handling, and signage for nicotine and electronic waste at point of sale.

Remedy disproportionate exposures to TPQ through density restrictions in low-income and minority communities.

TPW mitigation fee on tobacco products.

Deposit/Return products on ESD products (Extended Producer Responsibility or EPR).

Quantify the local financial burden

The Center for Tobacco and the Environment at San Diego State University has created a model that communities can use with local data to estimate how much tobacco waste costs their area.

Example: Proportional Estimation, California Cities

Large California Cities (2020 IJERPH paper)

- Proportional estimation approach using commonly available data from largest U.S. cities
- Estimate cost of TPW based fixed 25% parameter
- LA: **\$19,703,611**
- San Diego: **\$7,066,021**
- San Jose: **\$3,908,981**
- San Fran: **\$4,195,867**

Santa Cruz

- Santa Cruz provided data on costs of all litter mitigation
- Estimate cost of TPW based fixed 25.3% parameter (average of 3 studies)
- Result: **\$2,067,654**

Link to state and national resources

TOBACCO PRODUCT WASTE

A Public Health and Environmental Toolkit



<https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Tobacco-Product-Waste-Toolkit.pdf>

Tobacco Product Waste in California: A White Paper

Thomas E. Novotny MD MPH,^a Stella Aguinaga Bialous, DrPH,^b

Kyra Hill JD,^c Laila Hamzai, MPH,^d Marc Beutel PhD,^e Eunha Hoh PhD,^f

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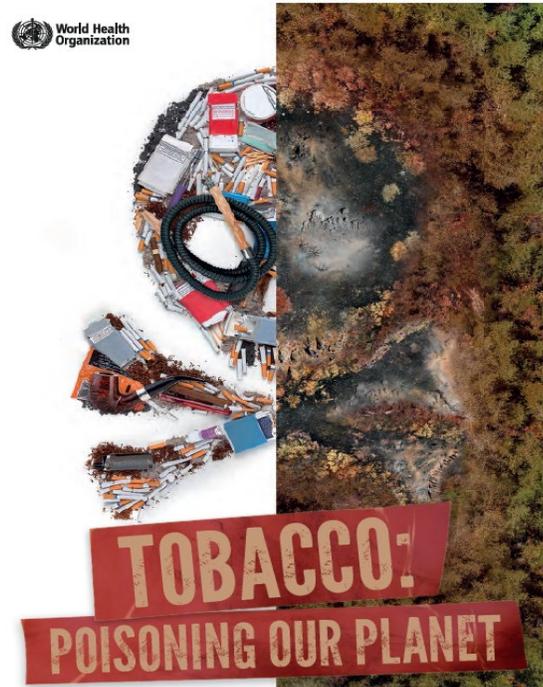
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https://merg.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Tobacco-Product-Waste-in-California_-_A-White-Paper.pdf



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240051287>



Marine debris on the shoreline of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary:

An assessment of activities contributing to marine debris, categories and composition, spatial distribution, and predictor variables



Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Final Report

October 2023

<https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/other-reports/marine-debris-shoreline-monterey-bay-national-marine-sanctuary-assessment-behaviors-contributing-marine-debris-categories-composition-spatial-distribution-and-predictor-variables>

Engage the media to spread key messages

OPINION > LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter: Cigarette butts are smelly, poisonous and gross

No Easy Solution For Cigarette Butts On The Beach

KAZU | By Erika Mahoney
Published August 30, 2018 at 3:00 AM PDT



▶ LISTEN • 3:54



1 of 8

According to Ocean Conservancy, cigarette butts are the most common piece of litter found on beaches around the world.

Brandi Bates

The Butt Stops Here: Reducing Cigarette Waste-PW080

July 22, 2018 | By planetwatch

Filed in: [Climate Change](#) Tags: [cigarette butts](#), [ocean pollution](#)



Podcast: [Play in new window](#) | [Download](#) (Duration: 53:41 — 49.2MB) | [Embed](#)

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In 2015, the Ocean Conservancy's annual cleanup found a total of 2,127,666 cigarette butts, over twice as many as the next most common form of litter. About half of the cigarette butts were picked up in the U.S., showing that while the problem is global, it is concentrated in the U.S..

Rachel Kidd



LATEST HEADLINES

Guest Commentary | Urge supervisors to ban polluting tobacco filters

By [SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL](#)

PUBLISHED: August 27, 2024 at 2:13 PM PDT

Focus on health equity & environmental justice

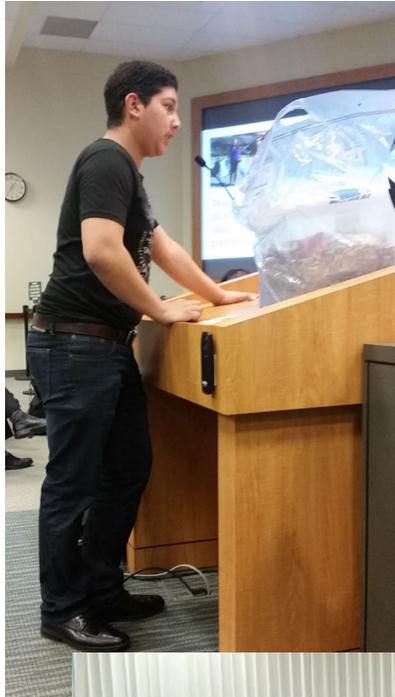


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByOqnTUc98E>

Help people to “see” the problem



Policy meetings early and often



8. Tobacco Product Waste

[The Cigarette Surfboard](#)



County TPW Ad Hoc Committee

- Co-chaired by two Supervisors who were passionate about the issue
- Included community leaders, non-profit partners, environmental advocates, and a representative from each of the four incorporated cities
- Hosted numerous education and outreach events including a **tobacco retailer listening session**
- Evaluated a variety of policy approaches
- Worked with County Counsel and the Public Health Law Center (PHLC) to develop policy language



SPEAKER SERIES: BAN THE BUTT

Join us to chat with a panel of local district supervisors, scientists, and nonprofit representatives to learn about the impacts single use cigarette filters have on environmental and public health.

SEYMOUR CENTER
Sunday
May 19, 2024
10:30 - 12:30
Breakfast & coffee provided

[Register Here](#)

saveourshores.org/event/speaker-series-ban-the-butt/



Big Tobacco's Arguments

Removing filters will create more health problems for smokers.

According to the World Health Organization, filters offer no health benefits and create a false sense of safety. Filters are essentially single-use plastics with no filtration value.

Why don't you just enforce existing no smoking and littering laws? (More signs, more garbage)

While those laws are important, they haven't prevented widespread tobacco litter. Cigarette butts are still found in large numbers often within 10-feet from "No Smoking" signs. Enforcement is limited by staff capacity, and it's unrealistic to monitor every smoker 24/7.

This policy will cost taxpayers money.

In fact, it could save money. A 2023 study estimated that over \$2M is spent annually managing tobacco waste in the City of Santa Cruz and reducing single-use products could lower cleanup costs.

This policy will put us out of business.

If adopted, the ordinance will include a multi-year transition period and support retailers in adapting to the changes...

Continued...

Won't smokers just get these products online?

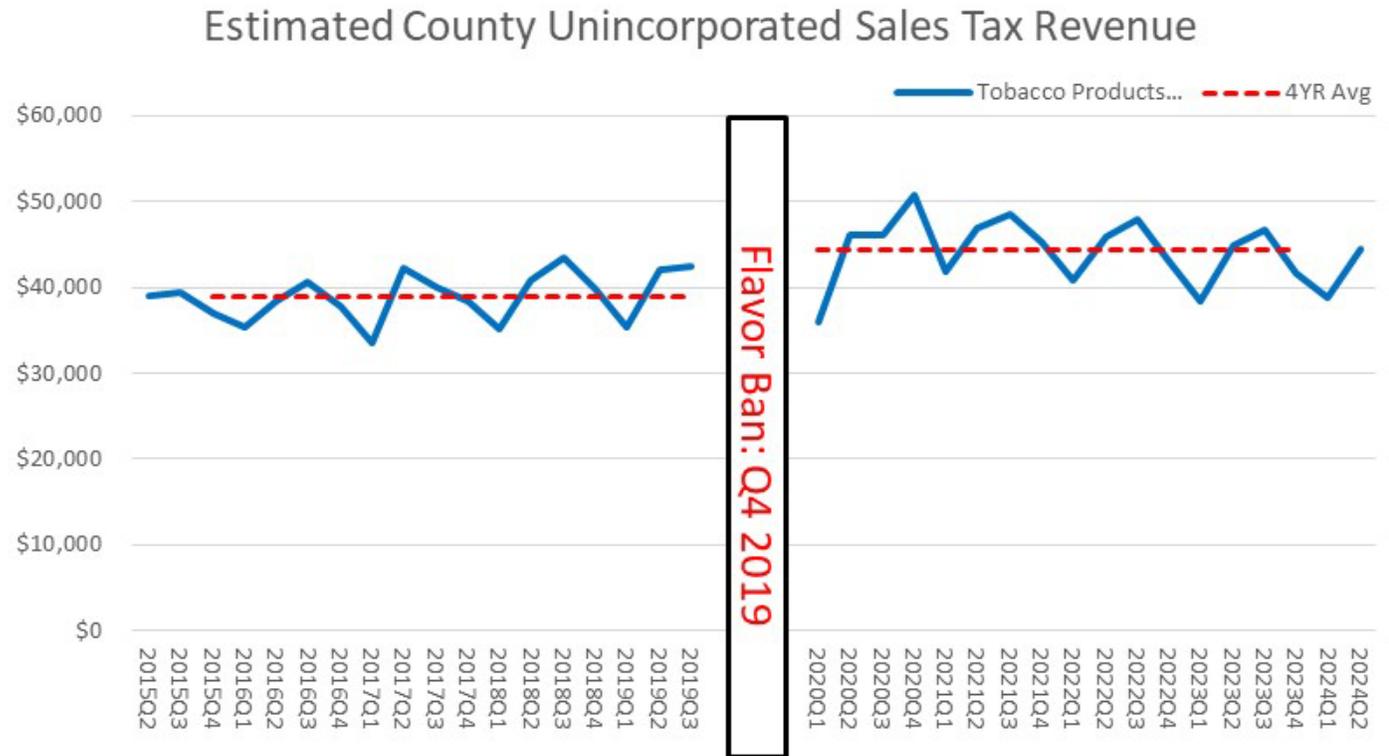
NO. Assembly Bill 3218 went into effect on January 1, 2025.

Any provisions in a local tobacco retail licensing ordinance will automatically apply with equal force to online and delivery sales.



Look at tobacco sales tax revenue data

The County's 2019 flavored tobacco sales ban led to a brief 3.1% decline in sales tax revenue over the initial six months, followed by **double-digit increases** as consumer behavior adjusted.



Remember, cigarette use is trending down

According to the 2022 California Health Interview Survey, 6% of adults use cigarettes.

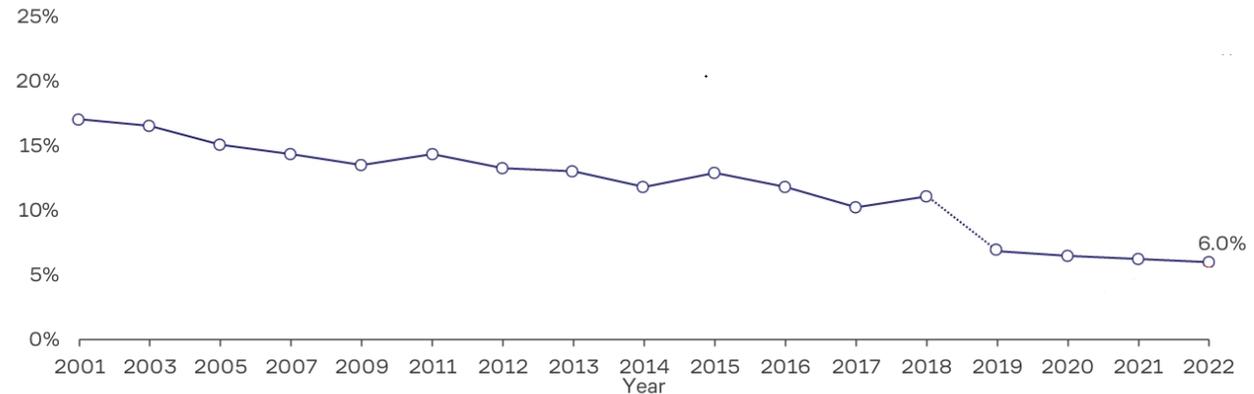
According to the 2024 California Youth Tobacco Survey 1.3% of high school students report using cigarettes in the last 30 days.

Tobacco Product Use

Adult Tobacco Product Use

Fewer adults are smoking cigarettes than ever before. In 2022, 6.0% (1.8 million) of California adults reported current cigarette smoking. Current tobacco use in this report is the use of any tobacco product in the past 30 days.

Figure 1. Current cigarette smoking among adults aged ≥18 years—California Health Interview Survey, 2001 to 2022



The dotted lines indicate a break in trend due to a methodology change. Prior to 2019, the survey was administered via computer-assisted telephone interview. Since 2019, the survey was administered via computer-assisted web interview and computer-assisted telephone interview. This methodology change significantly impacted cigarette smoking rates. Current vape use was first collected of all adults in 2017. See [Additional Notes](#) section for more information.

Source: California Health Interview Survey, CHIS 2001 to CHIS 2022 Adult Files. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research; October 2023.

Carefully craft policy language

Partially Inconsumable Cigarette/Cigar

“Any cigarette/cigar containing an embedded component or part commonly referred to or marketed as a filter that is not intended to be consumed, whether it is made of any material including, but not limited to, plastic, cellulose acetate, other fibrous plastic material, or any other inorganic, organic, or biodegradable material.”

- The term “partially consumable cigarette/cigar” was intentionally chosen to avoid perpetuating the industry myth of harm reduction through so-called filters.
- Broad material language keeps an unreliable industry from skirting the intention of the law.

<https://www.santacruzcountyca.gov/TobaccoWasteSubcommittee/Resources.aspx>

Ensure broad public support

Organizations

- All Waters
- Breathe California
- California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
- Cigarette Surfboard
- Coastal Watershed Council
- Ecology Action
- El Nido students & teachers
- Empower Watsonville youth
- First 5 Santa Cruz County
- Fishwise
- Kelp Stalkers
- Long Board Union
- Long Marine Lab
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
- Natural Resource Conservation District
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- O'Neill Sea Odyssey
- Ocean Conservancy
- Oral Health Access
- Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance
- Pitch In Santa Cruz
- SC County Commission on the Environment
- SC County Community Action Board
- SC County Fish & Wildlife Commission
- Santa Cruz County Office of Education
- SC County Tobacco Education Coalition
- Santa Cruz Waves
- Save Our Shores

- Save the Waves
- Scotts Valley High School Beach Clean-up Club
- Seymour Center
- Surfrider Santa Cruz
- Trash Talkers
- World Surfing Reserve

Individuals

Parents, teachers, doctors, surfers, current and former public office holders (Gail Pellerin, Mark Stone, Bill Monning) scientists, youth, etc.

Grassroots campaign efforts pay off

- One-on-one education meetings with every supervisor and multiple County advisory committees
- More than 50 letters of support
- Op-eds and letters to the editor
- Signed petitions
- More than three dozen speakers representing health, education, environment, and youth-serving organizations
- More than two dozen pieces of earned media



Policy success!

On October 8, 2024, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously 5-0 to ban the sale of filtered tobacco products.



“Enforcement...shall begin on January 1, 2027 or on a date that two additional jurisdictions in the County approve a similar ordinance, whichever date is later.”

Big Tobacco pushes back



SMART SOLUTIONS, NOT BANS

Addressing Tobacco Waste In Santa Cruz Without Harming Public Health Or Local Business

Santa Cruz is voting on a filtered tobacco product ban. Let's pursue real solutions—not performative policies that risk public health and threaten our local economy.

TAKE ACTION

<https://www.cfca.energy/smart-solutions/>

Santa Cruz city leaders don't blink



In June, the Santa Cruz City Council sided with the environment, data, health, and science, passing the ordinance 7-0. The City of Capitola followed in August 5-0.

Questions?

Thank You

