



Tobacco Product Waste Cleanups

YOUTH ACTIVITY GUIDE



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BACK- GROUND

This resource was developed by the California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN) to support local and regional organizations in engaging youth in tobacco product waste cleanups. This tool is designed to guide adult partners in creating a safe opportunity for youth volunteers to be involved in identifying and documenting community problems related to tobacco product waste.

Tobacco product waste cleanups are a simple and relatively quick way to engage large groups of young people in data collection and policy advocacy. Collected waste can be used to identify a local problem (i.e., tobacco product use in outdoor spaces), evaluate the effectiveness of an existing smoke or tobacco-free policy, and/or to advocate for the creation of a policy that will reduce secondhand smoke and tobacco product waste exposure in communities.

Tobacco product litter, namely cigarette butts, discarded tobacco product packages, e-cigarette waste (e.g., pods, disposable devices, e-juice bottles, etc.), and smokeless tobacco cans, are the most littered items in the world. Cigarette butts alone make up more than one third of all collected litter (Truth Initiative, 2017). Tobacco litter is toxic to the environment because cigarette butts are non-biodegradable, and retain the toxic chemicals that cigarettes contain. Cigarette butts are often littered in parks, beaches, playgrounds, and other public outdoor areas that youth frequent, and are poisonous to people and animals that ingest them.

Due to the current e-cigarette epidemic, there has been an increase in e-cigarette waste, especially pods. In 2020, youth use of disposable vaping devices dramatically increased. As product use rates increase, it's more likely there will also be an increase in littered waste. A recent study by the Truth Initiative (2021) found that almost half (49.1%) of young people who use electronic smoking devices don't know how to dispose of their pods and/or devices. Among this group, 10% reporting throwing product waste on the ground.

Because of the risks that tobacco product waste pose to young children, animals, and the community as a whole, tobacco-waste cleanups are a good way to engage youth in advocating for policies that reduce commercial tobacco use and, as a result, decrease tobacco waste. Tobacco waste cleanups can be used as a tool to show the need for policy adoption, to measure policy outcomes, or to measure compliance with an existing policy.



ACTIVITY SPECIFICS

APPROPRIATE AGE GROUP: 6th - 12th grade

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Minimum 5, no maximum

PREP TIME: 1-2 weeks to allow time for volunteer recruitment and to make travel arrangements for youth.

ACTIVITY DURATION: 1 hour

MATERIALS:

- Large Ziplock bags
- Plastic/latex gloves
- Hand sanitizer
- Permanent markers
- Large mason jars or other air-tight, smell-proof containers to store the waste and display to community members or decision makers

OPTIONAL SUPPLIES:

- Trash pickers
- Maps marked with zones to ensure that volunteers are covering the entire area
- Refreshments for volunteers
- Camera
- Video camera

COST: \$0-\$100 for materials and snacks for volunteers

LOCATION: Parks, beaches, playgrounds, schools, or other public outdoor space.

PREPARING FOR THE ACTIVITY

- Choose an area in the community where outdoor tobacco use is a problem.
- Determine the day and time the cleanup will be conducted. It's best to go in the afternoon to ensure that there is tobacco waste available to clean up.
- Arrange travel for youth volunteers.
- Determine what will be done with the collected waste. Consider displaying the collected tobacco waste in a clear container to bring attention to the issue, educate the community on tobacco and the environment, and to advocate for local tobacco policy.



THE DAY OF THE ACTIVITY

- If possible, send youth out in pairs or small groups with one young person taking a tally of each littered tobacco product while another picks up the waste.
- Give each youth volunteer gloves and two re-sealable bags. One bag can be used for vape-related waste, one bag for all other tobacco product waste. Ask youth to count littered items as they collect them. Have youth write the number of and type of waste (e.g., cigarette butt, cigar package, Juul pod) collected on the bag with the marker or a pad of paper. If recording on paper, label the bag with a number and report collected waste under that corresponding number on the paper.
- If you have enough volunteers, assign one or two students to be the photographer(s). These pictures can be used for educational and advocacy purposes, including sharing with decision makers and posting on social media platforms.
- Total the amount of waste collected. Count the total number of cigarette butts, pods, disposable devices, smokeless tobacco cans, tobacco wrappers, and other tobacco-related waste.
- Evaluate your tobacco waste cleanup. Consider your strengths, limitations, and weaknesses. Use the results to perform your next advocacy day.

TIPS & THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Tobacco waste is toxic and smelly. You will not want to recount the butts, pods, and other waste. Having one student in charge of keeping a tally while another one picks up the waste will help with keeping an accurate count.
 - In addition to picking up cigarette butts, pick up other tobacco-related waste (tips from little cigars, cigarillo wrappers, Juul pods, packaging, etc.)
- If you have extra volunteers, use the time to educate those in the park, school, or public area about your work and what you're hoping to achieve (e.g. smoke-free parks ordinance). Volunteers can also collect petition signatures, letters of support, or stories of how tobacco use at parks, schools, etc. affect them and their friends or families.
- This can be a great opportunity to invite local media outlets to get the word out to the community about the work your group is doing.

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

MAKE YOUR DATA MORE RELATABLE.

Consider calculating the amount of waste collected by each volunteer every minute. To do so, divide the total amount of waste collected by the number of volunteers and the length of time of your clean up. For example, if you had 15 volunteers who collected 2,670 cigarette butts in 60 minutes, your calculation would be:

- $2,670 \text{ pieces of waste} / 15 \text{ volunteers} = 178$
- $178 / 60 \text{ minutes} = 2.97$
- On average, each volunteer picked up 3 pieces of TPW per minute during the cleanup.

TURN YOUR DATA INTO STORIES. The young people you recruit for the clean-up can share their experience collecting the waste and how tobacco product waste affects them and their community.

DEBRIEF. Allowing time for a debrief lets the group discuss findings, what to do with the collected waste, share stories, evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the cleanup etc.

COMPILE DATA and then analyze and present the data to decision makers to advocate for the adoption of an outdoor smoke/tobacco free ordinance within your municipality.

ADVOCATE. If your municipality established a smoke or tobacco-free outdoor air ordinance prior to the observations, present to local decision makers and advocate for increased policy compliance (i.e., better signage).

USE DATA TO EDUCATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS and peers at health fairs, community events, or at school assemblies.

CREATE A MAP indicating restaurants, beaches, parks, etc. with smoke or tobacco-free outdoor areas and make this map available to the community.



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