

north shore news

LETTER: Carelessly tossed cigarette butts are more than a fire risk

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Letter writer Elise Roberts snapped this photo of discarded cigarette butts. Photo Elise Roberts

Dear Editor:

The Lynn Valley brush fire (allegedly) caused by a carelessly tossed cigarette butt is just one example of the negative effect of butts in our community. Not only are butts a major cause of fires, they are toxic to the environment.

World waterways are contaminated with 1.7 billion pounds of butts annually. Such a tiny little item is having a huge negative impact.

During the rainy season, butts float along streets and down storm drains; small enough to bypass catchment areas, they enter local creeks and shorelines. Butts are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic, which can take 25 years to decompose. Filters are specially designed to accumulate toxins, which, when leached out, are lethal to species of fish, shorebirds, crustaceans and plankton.

Sadly, the root of the problem is the well-intended smoke-free policies that have led to an absence of ashtrays everywhere, even in cars; the additional \$100 cost for ashtrays prevents smokers from asking.

Vancouver Coastal Health states that only eight per cent of people smoke. A number of those smokers toss irresponsibly. On Feb. 28, I picked up 1,142 butts at Waterfront Park. One butt can pollute 30 litres of water, yet our government websites and media are completely absent of any media messaging regarding this. Please ask for a pocket ashtray when you purchase your smokes.

Elise Roberts

Litter Free Communities/Cigarette Butt Free Lonsdale Campaign

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