

## The Great American Smokeout

11/15/07

In light of the fact that today is the Great American Smokeout, I am submitting (with permission) an article the former Environmental Education Specialist, Carey Pauquette-Schalm wrote entitled: "Don't Touch the Butts," which is a re-print from a column dated August 16, 2005:

Let's get right to business. This article is for all smokers who toss the butts out the window. Before putting this paper down... I was a smoker for over 10 years (sorry Grandma and Grandpa) and held these same convictions then. My commute to work currently takes me along M-20 where on numerous occasions people have thrown their cigarette butts at me. Okay, let's get this straight – you pollute your body and the immediate environment with your cigarette smoke then you finish it off by tossing it out the window? At least be a conscientious smoker. We all have our vices, nicotine was mine for many years, but we also need to take responsibility for those habits. I have replaced my nicotine with my wonderful son, Avery. What would you think if I was rolling along in front of you and I tossed a dirty diaper out my window? You would probably follow me to my home and offer me a few choice words.

So, as my 3 year old nephew recently put it, if you "don't touch the butts" you won't have a problem. I understand smoking and would love to offer you support in quitting. I can tell you how much better I feel and how I did it if you want me to. What I cannot do is sit here quietly and let you continue throwing a burning ember, at the end of a chemical sponge at me in my combustible-liquid-powered vehicle.

Let me share some facts on the waste generated by throwing your cigarette butts out the window.

- Cigarette butts are not biodegradable; they are made up of cellulose acetate, otherwise known as plastic.
- Once thrown out they get into our soils and water systems where the chemicals they captured are released to travel through our environment.
- They take decades to break down.
- According to Keep America Beautiful, 34.45% of the litter generated in the United States in 2003 was cigarette butts.
- Keep America Beautiful also reports 4.5 billion cigarette butts per year are discarded improperly.

I'm not telling you to quit. I just want you to be responsible for your actions. It is your body, your health, your money, and your time, but it is everybody's waste issue. Just keep them in your car or make a pit-stop at the dumpster to throw away your butts. Simply tuck your cigarette butt in the cellophane of your pack of cigarettes until you are close enough to a trash can. Or call the health department for more information on quitting smoking.

According to the American Cancer Society, tobacco use contributed to over 438,000 premature deaths in the U.S. between 1997 and 2001; 30% percent of all cancer deaths; 80% of

lung cancer deaths can be attributed to smoking. It is estimated that 45 million U.S. adults or 22.8% of the population currently smoke. However, smokers are not the only ones dying prematurely. About 3,000 nonsmoking adults die annually from lung cancer as a result of breathing second-hand smoke. ETS, environmental tobacco smoke, causes 35,000 nonsmoking adults to die from heart disease (Cancer Facts and Figures 2007.) On average, smoking reduces life expectancy by 14 years (Cancer Facts and Figures 2006.)

Now is the time to quit! Don't put it off any more. You and your family deserve to breathe easier. If you wish to visit this year's American Cancer Society web page dedicated to quitting smoking in communities, schools, health systems and worksites, please visit: <http://acsf2f.com/gaso/>.

As always, if you have questions about recycling or environmental issues, please contact me at 989-773-9631 or [recycling@isabellacounty.org](mailto:recycling@isabellacounty.org). Happy Recycling!

*[Marnie Basney is the Isabella County Recycling Center's Environmental Education Specialist]*