



## SURFRIDER CALLS FOR A BAN ON CIGARETTE FILTERS

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**As World No Tobacco Day approaches on May 31, 2025, Surfrider Foundation Europe is taking a strong stand: it is time to ban cigarette filters.**

Wrongly presented as protective devices, these filters are in fact a major environmental scourge and offer no health benefits.

**A false ally for health, a true poison for the environment**

Composed of cellulose acetate, a non-biodegradable plastic, cigarette butts slowly break down under UV rays, moisture, and mechanical actions such as wind, rain, or trampling, eventually disintegrating into microplastics. During this process, they gradually release a multitude of toxic chemical substances into the environment, found both in the filter and the remnants of burned tobacco. These substances include heavy metals like lead, cadmium, and arsenic, pesticides, nicotine, and volatile organic compounds. Such elements can contaminate soils and aquatic environments, posing threats to ecosystems and human health. Each filter can contain between 12,000 and 15,000 plastic microfibers, which ultimately end up in soils or water bodies.

**Each year, around 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are discarded into the environment worldwide.** In many cases, they are carried away by wind and rain into sewage systems or waterways, or simply crushed into the sand—eventually ending up in the ocean. At first glance, a cigarette butt may seem harmless. Yet it is in fact a toxic plastic bomb, irreversibly infiltrating aquatic ecosystems.

Contrary to the image promoted for decades, filters have never been proven to provide any health benefits to smokers, according to the [World Health Organization](#). Filters primarily serve economic and marketing interests for tobacco manufacturers, as they make the smoke taste milder by reducing its harshness. This facilitates youth initiation and can help attract new consumers. [Recent studies](#) even suggest that filters may worsen health risks by softening the taste of tobacco, thereby encouraging deeper inhalation of the smoke.

## **Avoidable pollution, a necessary ban**

Surfrider Foundation Europe joins the calls of an international coalition made up of environmental organizations, public health experts, and scientists working within the framework of the Global Treaty against Plastic Pollution. Together, they demand a common-sense measure: the ban on single-use cigarette filters. Some jurisdictions are already leading the way, with bills under discussion in the United States, the Netherlands, and elsewhere.

## **Removing obstacles: deconstructing preconceived notions**

Surfrider knows that the filter is still mistakenly perceived as an essential element by the majority of smokers. As a legacy of misleading marketing, it reinforces the illusion of safety and user comfort. It is therefore essential to support this transition with an educational effort. **The filter does not protect; it does not eliminate the risk for smokers.**

Surfrider calls on citizens to rethink their relationship with this omnipresent waste (the number one item found in Surfrider's waste collections) that is rarely questioned. Changing standards starts with changing our perspective.

## Why act now ?

- **Because filters pollute without protecting.**
- **Because recycling is not a solution : cigarette butts are hazardous waste and their depollution isn't possible. It is complex and costly.**
- **Because removing filters reduces plastic pollution and allows to install the implementation of stricter policies against littering.**

Banning filters means taking back control over preventable pollution, protecting the Ocean, and holding the tobacco industry accountable.

*"Banning filters may seem radical, even irrational. But what is truly irrational is that they are still allowed, despite clear scientific evidence: they do not protect smokers and cause severe plastic and chemical pollution. Behind the filter, the reality is clear: this pollution is avoidable. It must stop,"* explains Lucie Padovani, Advocacy Officer for Surfrider Foundation.

## A European mobilization on May 31

In light of the scale of pollution caused by cigarette butts, **Surfrider calls on citizens, businesses, and decision-makers to take action.** On the weekend of **May 31**, World No Tobacco Day, Surfrider will mobilize thousands of volunteers across Europe through its campaign **Surfrider Against Cigarette Butts**. Everyone is invited to participate or organize their own cigarette butt cleanups to raise awareness about this pollution and its disastrous consequences.

The objectives of this campaign are :

- Alert on the omnipresence of this plastic waste in our environment,
- Mobilize thousands of persons across all Europe,
- Invite citizens to take part in citizen science activities (by counting cigarette butts, they help gather data that can be used to put pressure on decision-makers),
- Assert a clear stance in favor of banning the cigarette filter.

In 2024, Surfrider mobilized **862 citizens across five European countries** (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Germany and the Netherlands) through **39 cigarette butts collects**. The result : **183 353 butts have been collected**.

Link to participate or organize its own collect :

[www.initiativesoceanes.org/en](http://www.initiativesoceanes.org/en)

### **Link to illustration images**

We remain at the disposal of journalists for any request for information or interviews.

Many collects are already scheduled for the weekend of May 31 across Europe — with more to come throughout the month:

#### **In France :**

- [Paris – May 31](#)
- [Brest, Bretagne – May 31](#)
- [Lyon, Rhône – May 31](#)
- [Cherbourg – May 31](#)
- [Lamballe, Bretagne – June 1st](#)

#### **In Germany :**

- Bodensee – May 31
- [Berlin – May 30](#)
- [Hamburg – May 31](#)
- [Hamburg – May 31](#)
- [Karlsruhe – May 31](#)
- [Ludwigshafen – May 31](#)

#### **In Spain :**

- [Valence – May 26](#)
- [Carreño, Asturias – May 28](#)
- [Bilbao, Bizkaia – May 29](#)
- [San Sebastian, Pays Basque – May 30](#)
- [Cangas, Galice – May 31](#)
- [Bueu, Galice – May 31](#)
- [Irun, Pays Basque – May 31](#)
- [San Sebastian, Pays Basque – May 31](#)
- [Pasaia, Gipuzkoa – May 31](#)
- [Calvia, Mallorque – May 31](#)
- [Barcelona – May 31](#)
- [Cantabria – May 31](#)
- [Moaña, Galicia - June 1st](#)
- Getxo, Bizkaia – June 1st

#### **In the Netherlands :**

- [Zandvoort – June 1st](#)
- [Amsterdam – June 1st](#)

In **Portugal** :

- [Porto – May 31](#)

In **Greece** :

- [Athens – June 1st](#)

### **About Surfrider Foundation Europe**

*The NGO Surfrider Foundation is a collective of positive activists who take concrete action on the ground on a daily basis to pass on a preserved ocean to future generations. Our mission: To carry the voice of the Ocean loud and clear! Our weapons? Raising awareness and mobilising citizens, children and adults alike (in particular through 48 volunteer branches throughout Europe), using our scientific expertise to carry out lobbying actions and transform companies. Discover the association on <https://surfrider.eu/> or via [this video](#)*

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