



Claire O'Neill on 'Big Butts'

As yet another UK Festival season draws to a close I'm taking a look at the highs and lows of the season.

One element that is particularly standing out to me this year brings two very different images to mind. The first is of beautifully decorated stands, with clear budget on décor/lighting – VIP stands and gorgeous ladies serving behind the counter. Large illuminated balloons, floating like a big fake plastic moon on the horizon, imprinted with the inspired message of the wondrous goods of this glowing mecca... 'CIGARETTES'.

Is this what we want spilt across our festival fields?
(image thanks to treehugger.com):

Even at events where a shrine to cigarettes isn't present cigarette litter is still a problem.

Here are a few interesting facts:

- Nearly all cigarette filters are composed of a bundle of 12,000 plastic-like cellulose acetate fibers
- They can take up to 12 years to degrade.
- Just one cigarette butt can contain 200 chemicals contaminating 1m² of land.
- Most littered butts end up washed into the water streams causing toxicity of water, and ingestion by fish, birds and other marine animals. They also block drainage systems.
- Within an hour of contact with water, cigarette butts can begin leaching chemicals such as cadmium, lead and arsenic into the marine environment.
- Those remaining on land seep chemicals such as Nicotine, Pyrene and Flourathene into sediment.
- Cigarette litter is unsightly and can result in social disamenity (litter attracts litter).
- It is the most common form of litter in England found on 79% of streets. This figure is increasing rapidly (20% in the last 4 years).
- 122 Tonnes of cigarette litter are dropped every day.
- Globally, one in eight trees is cut down for tobacco production
- If land used for tobacco production were turned over to food production it could feed 10m to 20m of the globe's 28m malnourished inhabitants.



Some conscientious organisers are already taking measures to reduce this pollution at their events. The Glade festival hand out old camera film holders for people to use as portable ashtrays. The Boom Festival in Portugal for many years has handed out recycled, reshaped plastic bottles with screw-tops for the same purpose.

Unfortunately – looking at the floor near where people congregate at these festivals many people still don't use the ashtrays even when they are provided for free on the gate. Old habits die hard. So what is the solution? We believe that if festivals all drive home the message, and people who are conscious of their actions lead by example, then hopefully a culture will be created in which flicking cigarette butts on the floor is a 'faux pas'. To define:

“A verbal or written communication, action or gesture affecting a group of people that results in unintended acute personal embarrassment.”

Another action that can be taken is to minimise the source of the pollution. I won't naively ignore the fact that these outlets generate a large amount of income for the festivals, and sure it's a product that is wanted by a large part of the audience. The question is at what cost – not only as far as pollution is concerned but the general quality of the event itself as a result of the litter? To sell cigarettes is one thing, but to glamorise is taking it a step far.

One director did point out to me that we have bars selling alcohol and it is not considered wrong to have these promoted and glamorised. I agree that yes – it would be hypocritical to condemn the advertising of cigarettes on health grounds when alcohol is not exactly bursting with vitality. However, my point here is to do with the waste stream (although I will slip in the question why aren't huge government health warnings plastered over these huge cigarette signs?).

If you are serious about organising a green event, don't invite glam cigarette bars, drive home the message to 'bin your butts', and provide the audience and crew with the means to do so.

Claire O'Neill, Sept 2008.

For more info use the following links:

<http://www.nobutts.com.au/NoButts/default.asp>

<http://www.cigarettelitter.org/index.asp?PageName=OnTheWeb>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/mar/02/green.smokers>

<http://www.globalissues.org/article/533/tobacco#Tobaccoproductiondamagetheenvironment>

<http://www.longwood.edu/cleanva/cigbuttimpacts.htm>

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/legislation/cnea/cigarette-litter.pdf>

<http://www.ashcan.co.uk>