

# Kroger Company

## Discarded Cigarette Pollution

### 2025

**Whereas:** In its 2023 ESG Report, Kroger proudly touts its many initiatives to reduce the use of plastics and waste in general, but oddly ignores cigarettes and the resulting environmental harm they create.

Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter in the world, as approximately 5.6 trillion cigarettes are smoked every year worldwide. Cigarette waste constitutes an estimated 30% of the total litter (by count) on US shorelines, waterways and on land.<sup>1</sup>

The World Health Organization states that products such as cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes add to the build-up of plastic pollution. Cigarette filters contain microplastics and make up the second-highest form of plastic pollution worldwide. Tobacco product waste also contains over 7000 toxic chemicals, including known human carcinogens.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, “every year the tobacco industry costs the world more than 8 million human lives, 600 million trees, 200,000 hectares of land, 22 billion tonnes of water and 84 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite claims by the tobacco industry that tobacco use in the United States is declining, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported that the number of cigarettes that the largest cigarette companies in the United States sold to wholesalers and retailers nationwide increased from 202.9 billion in 2019 to 203.7 billion in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

The US is the second largest market for cigarettes in the world, with revenues exceeding \$82 billion in 2023.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that over 80%, or over 4 trillion cigarette butts are littered each year. In the US, some 263 billion cigarettes were sold, and, assuming 80% were disposed of improperly, this would mean about 77 million pounds of cigarette-butt litter are dropped on the ground each year.<sup>6</sup>

A study published in 2022 concluded that smokers’ knowledge of cigarette butts’ toxicity, biodegradability, harmfulness to human and marine health was a key determinant in how they

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3088407/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oceancare.org/en/stories\\_and\\_news/cigarette-butts-pollution/](https://www.oceancare.org/en/stories_and_news/cigarette-butts-pollution/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/31-05-2022-who-raises-alarm-on-tobacco-industry-environmental-impact>

<sup>4</sup> [FTC Report Finds Annual Cigarette Sales Increased for the First Time in 20 Years | Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftc.gov/press-release/2021/02/ftc-report-finds-annual-cigarette-sales-increased-first-time-20-years)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statista.com/topics/7137/cigarettes-in-the-us/#topicOverview>

<sup>6</sup> [Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors about Cigarette-Butt Littering among College-Aged Adults in the United States - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6811111/) 2.1

disposed of used cigarettes. In fact, “Smokers who thought of cigarette butts as litter were 3.68 (95% CI 2.04 to 6.66) times more likely to properly dispose of their butts.”<sup>7</sup>

**BE IT RESOLVED:** Shareholders request that our Company report on its efforts to educate its customers who purchase tobacco products about the environmental damage caused by improperly discarded tobacco products and provide information on methods of proper disposal.

**Supporting Statement:** Kroger describes in its 2023 ESG report that it has adopted circular economy principles to divert items from landfills and reduce waste. We believe that because our Company sells tobacco products, it bears a responsibility to educate customers about proper ways to dispose of these products.

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<sup>7</sup> [Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors about Cigarette-Butt Littering among College-Aged Adults in the United States - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#) 2.3