



# Bin your butt

A survey-based study on cigarette butt pollution and consumers behaviour in Cyprus

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Every year 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are released in the environment, making them the most littered item in the world. Studies proved that cigarette butts contaminate ecosystems with nicotine, aromatic polycyclic hydrocarbons and heavy metals, in addition they pose a threat to aquatic life.

In 2020 the NGO “Let’s make Cyprus green” started “Bin your butt” campaign, a project with the purpose of reducing cigarette butt pollution in Cyprus through the installation of Ballot Bins and anti-littering signs. The available data regarding coastal litter in Cyprus confirmed the global trend regarding cigarette butt pollution, making it the most found item collected during clean-ups. The objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the project through a survey carried out through social media. The survey included a total of 17 questions, including inquiries regarding the background, smoking habits, and general opinions about cigarette butt pollution.

The results suggest that students, people under 30 and smokers are the groups less aware regarding the risks of cigarette butt pollution, but they are also the groups according to who Ballot Bins would be effective. The study concluded that the campaign is effective because it targets the right groups. The research also pointed out that according to the interviewees the best measure to further reduce cigarette butt pollution are awareness raising and stricter fines and regulations.

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Key words: cigarette butt, ballot bins, coastal pollution, consumers behaviour

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cigarette butts are the most common type of litter found in world, in fact, every year 4.5 trillion cigarettes are dumped in the environment. Cigarette butts are made of four components, the filter, tobacco, ashes and paper. The filter is usually made of cellulose acetate, a type of plastic, that is not biodegradable and can take up to 10 years to break down. (Puls et al. 2011) In addition, cigarette butts are the part of the cigarette where the toxic compounds are concentrated, a threat to soil and water bodies because it has the potential to leach and contaminate them (Araújo & Costa 2019).

In December 2020 the NGO “Let’s make Cyprus Green” launched the campaign “Bin your Butt” in the city of Limassol, where they installed Ballot Bins in order to encourage smokers to properly dispose of CB. Ballot Bins differ from normal bins because they display a question to which smokers can reply by putting their cigarettes in one of the two answer columns. It is possible to see the most voted answer since the front of the bin is made of transparent glass and according to the producer the ludic method has potential to decrease CB pollution by 46%. The campaign also includes the installation of anti-littering signs across the island.

This thesis will analyse the problem of cigarette butt pollution and “Let’s make Cyprus green” approach and suggested solution to the aforementioned issue. The purpose is to define the effectiveness of the project through the analyses of a survey carried out amongst frequent visitors and residents of Cyprus.

## 2 CIGARETTE POLLUTION

Cigarette butts discarded in the environment are a threat to the ecosystem and they can be toxic for microbes and insects, but also fishes and mammals. Cigarettes decompose slowly and averagely they lose only 37.8% of their mass during the first two years, as a consequence they can linger in the environment for long time and the damage they can create doesn't decrease with time. (Bonanomi et al. 2015)

Ecosystems that suffer from cigarette butt pollution are contaminated by nicotine, aromatic polycyclic hydrocarbons and heavy metals.

### 2.1 Natural environments chemical contamination from cigarette butts

According to the research "Detection of pharmaceutically active compounds in the rivers and tap water of the Madrid Region (Spain) and potential ecotoxicological risk" nicotine has been found in the river waters of the region of Madrid in Spain up to  $1.9 \times 10^{-3}$  mg L<sup>-1</sup> (Valcárcel et al. 2011), while another study carried out in Germany proved how discarded cigarette butts can be the source of contamination of nearby waterbodies through runoff. In fact, it shows that the cumulative nicotine release after 15 rainfall is 3.8 mg g<sup>-1</sup> and that 47% is due to the first precipitation (Order Green, Putschew & Nehls 2014).

Regarding polycyclic hydrocarbons and heavy metals contamination, a study done in Japan on roadside waste and their elution potential proved that cigarette butts can be the cause of arsenic, lead, copper, chromium, cadmium and PAHs contamination when in contact with atmospheric agents such as rain and wind (Moriwaki, Kitajima & Katahira 2009). Two years later, the study "Analysis of metals leached from smoked cigarette litter" furthermore investigated the leaching behaviours of different metals present in cigarette butts, reaching the conclusion that cigarette butts can be the source of barium, cadmium, chromium, copper, nickel, lead, iron, manganese, strontium, titanium and zinc contamination. In addition, the study suggests that metals such as nickel, lead, titanium and zinc can rapidly leach from cigarette butts after the first rainfall and consequently cause serious harm to the local organisms (Moerman & Potts 2011).

A study completed in 2017 studied cigarette butts in Bushehr coastal areas in the Persian Gulf and confirmed that significant amounts of metals such as cadmium, iron, arsenic, nickel, copper, zinc and manganese can enter marine environmental through cigarette litter (Dobaradaran et al. 2017).

Furthermore, CBs are a threat to aquatic life because they can be ingested and cause mechanical problems in the digestive systems, but they can also harm aquatic organisms through the chemicals that are either released in their stomach when ingested or transferred through the environment (Araújo et al. 2019).

## **2.2 Cigarette butt pollution in Cyprus**

According to the publication “European bathing water quality in 2019” Cyprus is the country in Europe with the better water quality. According to the study 95% of the bathing waters in Cyprus were of excellent qualities (European Environment Agency 2021). Nevertheless, there is little data about coastal litter in Cyprus.

The study “Persistent marine litter: small plastics and cigarette butts remain on beaches after organized beach clean-ups” tried to quantify the different types and amount of litter in Cypriot beaches through a project that lasted from 2016 to 2017. The project was carried out by the research centre AKTI and followed the protocol set by the Ocean Conservancy during International Coastal Cleanups. The clean-ups were organized in nine Blue Flag beaches in Cyprus, for a total of eighteen clean-ups, a cleaned area of 20 980  $m^2$  and 7658 items collected.

The litter collected has been divided into categories and in the following chart the results are shown. (Loizidou et al. 2018)

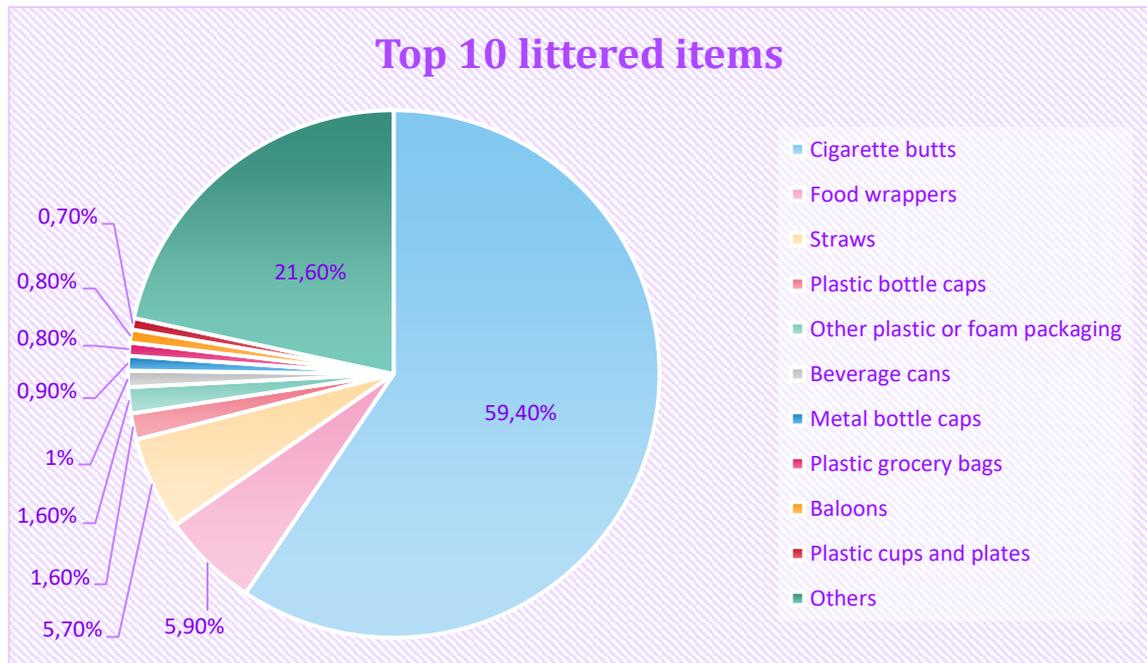


FIGURE 1. Top 10 littered items in Blue flag beaches (2016-2017)

Considering that Blue Flag beaches in Cyprus are cleaned daily by the local authorities, the study proved that even though large items are successfully collected, others, such as cigarette butts and single-use plastics can remain and accumulate even on the cleanest beaches (Loizidou et. al 2018).

In 2019, AKTI organized a beach and seabed clean-up campaign following the same method they used for the aforementioned research. They carried out 26 beach clean-ups and 4 seabed clean-ups, for a total of 27 000 items collected. The results are presented below, and they show that the percentage of cigarette butts account for about half of the items collected. (AKTI 2019)

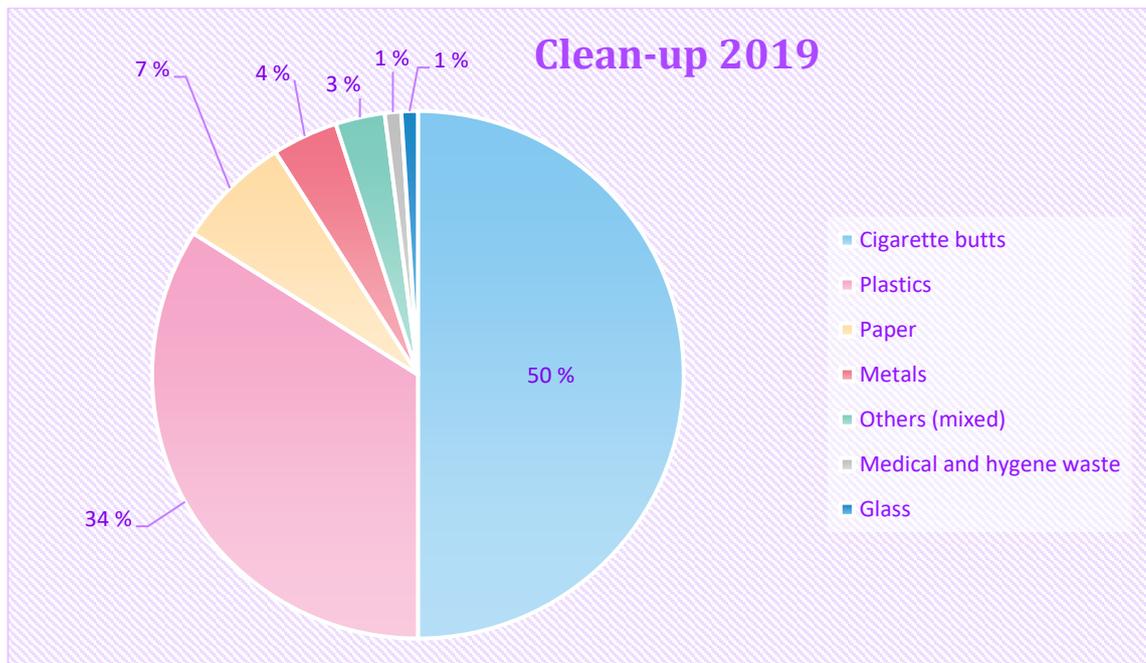


FIGURE 2. AKTI clean-ups 2019

The study “Measuring the Level of Environmental Performance on Coastal Environment before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study from Cyprus” studied the effects of the Covid19 pandemic on the environmental performance of coastal environments in Cyprus” showed that even though the amount of litter on the beaches decreased, cigarette butts are still one of the top found items and reason for major concern (Loizia et al. 2021).

### 2.3 Smokers’ behaviour and littering prevention

According to the research “Whose butt is it? tobacco industry research about smokers and cigarette butt waste” even though a high percentage of smokers do dispose of cigarette butts improperly, they don’t like seeing cigarette litter. The reasons to which littering was attributed varied from habit, to the “rebellious” feeling, to the fear that a cigarette butt in the bin will cause a fire. The study also suggested that even smokers who want to avoid littering sometimes toss cigarette butts on the ground when no bin is present, while others think that tossing cigarette butts on the ground is not considered as littering. (Smith & Novotny, 2011)

The study “A systematic review on cigarette butt management as a hazardous waste and prevalent litter: control and recycling” presented different methods to prevent cigarette litter. As short-term plan, better legislation regarding cigarette butt littering was considered effective, while when looking for long-term solutions, awareness raising and education was considered the best option. These two methods, together with adding the waste cost to cigarettes as a tax and applying the extended producer responsibility on cigarette butts, was what the study found most effective. (Torkashvand, Farzadkia, Mahdi Núñez-Delgado, Fernández-Sanjurjo & Álvarez-Rodríguez 2019)

### 3 “BIN YOUR BUTT” CAMPAIGN

The NGO “Let’s make Cyprus green” was founded in 2017 and its main goal is to spread awareness about waste pollution and the problem of plastic. They work simultaneously on three points: education, through their website, social media and by organizing presentations for students, action such as clean-ups and lastly, prevention, by encouraging people to switch to renewable products instead of using single-use ones, but also through campaign such as “Bin your Butt”.

“Bin your Butt” was launched in December 2020 through the collaboration with the Yermasoyia municipality, located in the city of Limassol. The NGO’s plan is to install Ballot Bins, customisable ashtrays which display a question with two answers. Smokers vote by putting their cigarette on the column under one of the two answers, which is made by a transparent material and will show the most voted one.



PICTURE 1. Ballot Bin (2020)

In addition, the campaign will be enhanced by anti-littering signs. The picture above shows the first one installed in the island and it states: “we throw approximately 4,5 trillion cigarettes each year globally, making cigarette litter the biggest source of pollution in the world. Please protect the environment by disposing your cigarette butt responsibly in the bin”.



PICTURE 2. Anti-littering sign

## 4 METHODS

To assess the effectiveness of the Ballot Bin installed by “Let’s make Cyprus green” and to understand the reasons of cigarette butt pollution in Cyprus, a survey was carried out. Due to the covid-19 pandemic restrictions the survey couldn’t be carried out in the area where the Ballot Bin was installed but had to be carried out through the NGO’s social media (Instagram) and posted on other Cypriot Facebook groups. The survey (Appendix 1.) contained a total of 17 questions, 6 of which were related to the background of the surveyees, 4 of them related to smoking and cigarette butt disposing habits, 5 regarding cigarette butt pollution and lastly 3 questions related to the “Bin your Butt” campaign. The survey was answered by a total of 124 people.

The background questions included gender, age, education, occupation and relation to Cyprus. The main purpose of this first part of the survey was to allow to cross-analyse the data and identify target groups for the campaign. The second part of the survey included questions related to smoking habits and cigarette butt pollution in general and the main goal of this section was to evaluate how familiar people are with the issue of cigarette butt pollution. As “Bin your butt” campaign includes awareness raising, the identification of the least aware groups will help to better shape the project. Lastly, the third part of the survey is more focused on Ballot bins and what people think about them, but also what other measures they believe would help fight cigarette butt pollution.

## 5 RESULTS

In order to better understand the effectiveness of “Bin your Butt” campaign a survey was carried out through social media. A total of 124 people answered, 69.4% don't smoke, 10.5% smoke occasionally and 20.2% smoke. Of the people that smoke, 35.4% dispose of their cigarette in a general waste bin when outdoors, 35.4% in an ashtray and 8,3% toss it on the ground (Figure 3).

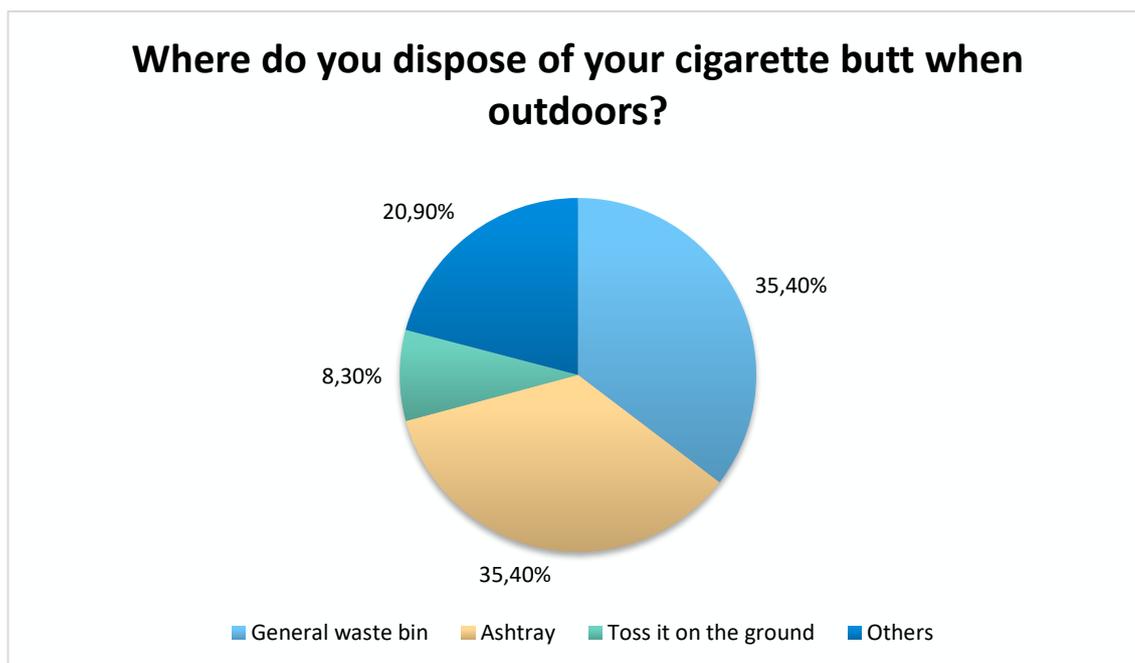


FIGURE 3. Where do you dispose of your cigarette butt when outdoors?

When asked where they dispose of the cigarette butt when no bin is around, 44 people answered and 34.1% claimed that they will toss it on the ground, 38.6% claimed they will keep it and throw it either at home or when they find a bin, 27.3% of the answers were irrelevant.

79% of the surveyees thinks that cigarette filters are not biodegradable, 15.3% don't know and 5.6% believe it is. The gender, age group, occupation and education were not relevant, while there was a significant difference in opinion between people that smoke, or smoke occasionally compared to people that don't smoke. 86% of people who don't smoke believe that cigarette filters are not biodegradable, while only 69.2% of people who smoke occasionally and 60% of people who smoke believe cigarette filters are not biodegradable.

When asked “How familiar are you with the risks of cigarette butt pollution?” on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is completely, the people interviewed answered as represented in the following graph (Figure 4).

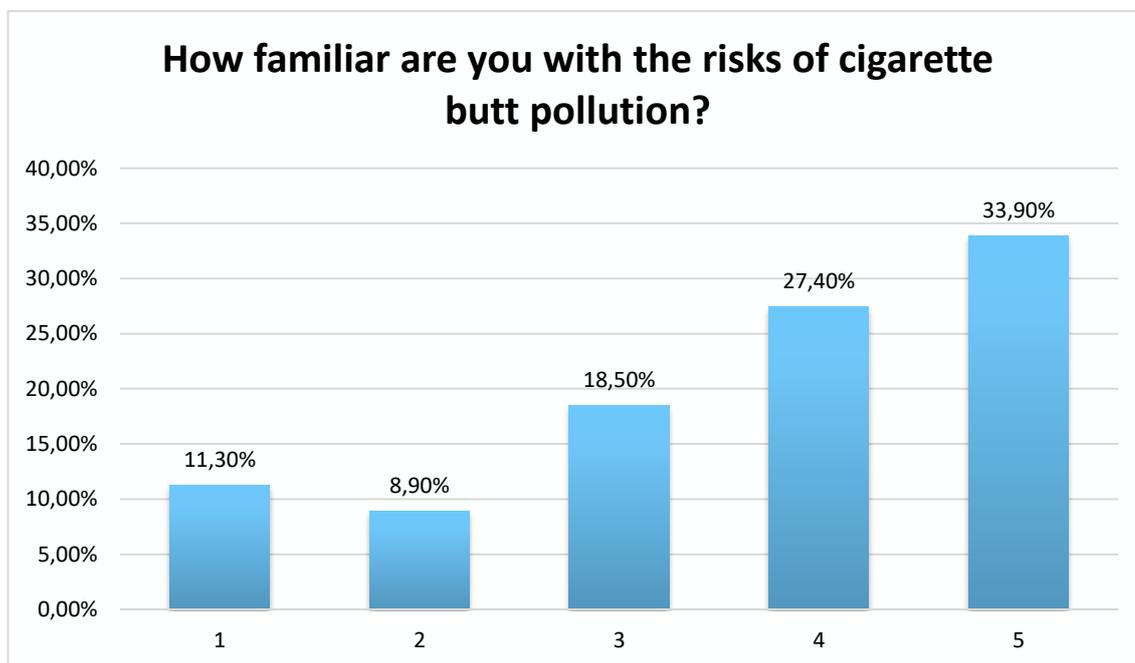


FIGURE 4. How familiar are you with the risks of cigarette butt pollution?

The knowledge of the risks of cigarette butt pollution seems to be related to gender, age group, education and if the person smokes or not. 25% of male claimed to be not at all familiar (on the scale 1 out of 5) with the risks of cigarette butt pollution while only 9.43% of female selected the option. The younger the interviewee the less is the familiarity with the risks of cigarette butt pollution: 52,2 % of people over 50 reported to be completely aware, while only 30% of people between 30 and 50 and people under 30 select 5 as level of familiarity. Regarding education, a high percentage of people with elementary (100%) and high school (43,7%) seemed to be completely aware of the risks, while a smaller percentage of people with vocational school (22.2%), university (31.8%) and post-graduate education (30%) were completely aware. Lastly, it appears that a bigger portion of people who don't smoke (39.5%) is completely aware of the risks, against only 23% of people who smoke occasionally and 20% of people who smoke.

91.% of people believes that cigarette butt pollution is a problem in Cyprus, while 8.1% answered maybe and 0.8% no. A vast majority of people who don't smoke

(96.5%) claims that cigarette butt pollution is a problem while only 76% of smokers agree with the statement. Also, the answer to this questions seems to be related to the level of awareness with the risks of cigarette butt pollution: 97,6% of people who stated to be completely aware with the risks also believes that cigarette butt pollution is a problem in Cyprus, while only 71.4% of the people who are not at all aware of the risks believe that cigarette butt pollution is a problem.

The answers to the question “How important do you think it is to reduce cigarette butt pollution” was rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is extremely, are represented in the graph below (Figure 5).

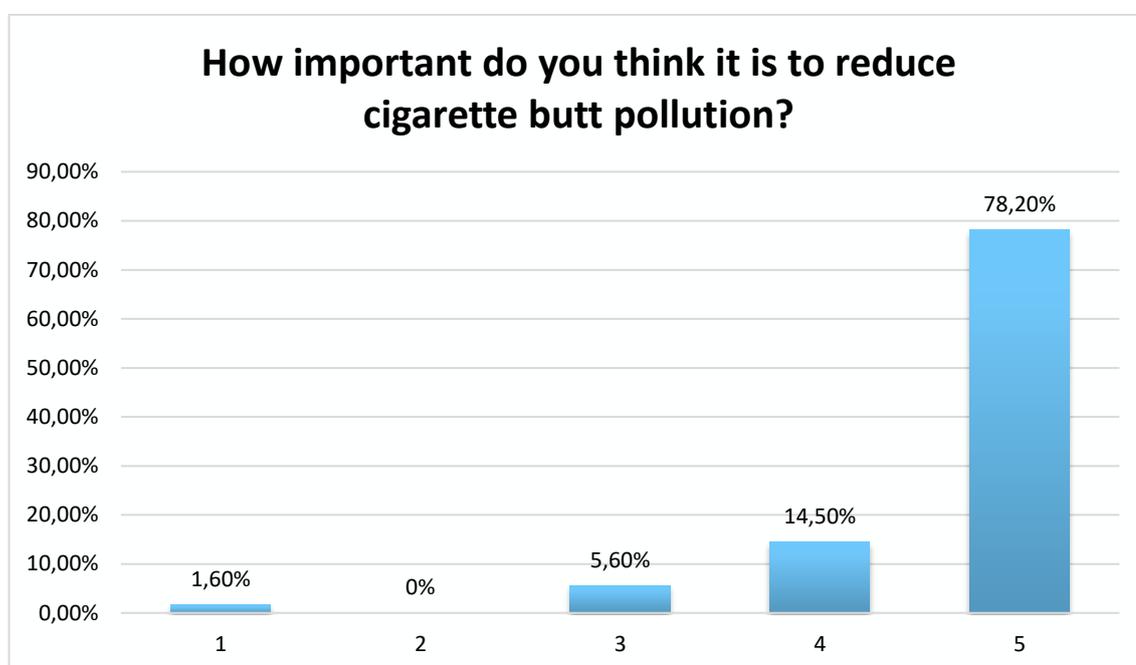


FIGURE 5. How important do you think it is to reduce cigarette butt pollution?

The answers represented in Figure 5. seem to have a relation to gender, age group, occupation, smoking habits, knowledge regarding the not biodegradability of cigarette butts, the familiarity with the risks of cigarette butt pollution and the opinion regarding cigarette butt pollution status in Cyprus.

82% of females finds extremely important to reduce cigarette butt pollution while only 50% of men select the importance level 5. Less people under 30 (61.5%) finds it extremely important, while more people between 30 and 50 (84%) and over 50 (78.2%) do. Regarding the occupation status, students are the category

that gives the least importance to reducing cigarette butt pollution: only 50% of them think it's extremely important, while in the other categories at least 70% of the interviewees find it extremely important. A smaller percentage of smokers (64%) and occasional smokers (46.1%) rate the importance 5, while more non-smokers (87.2%) do. The people who believe cigarette filters are biodegradable give less importance in reducing cigarette butt pollution, in fact only 28.5% of them find it extremely important, against 84.7% of people who think it's not biodegradable (Figure 6).

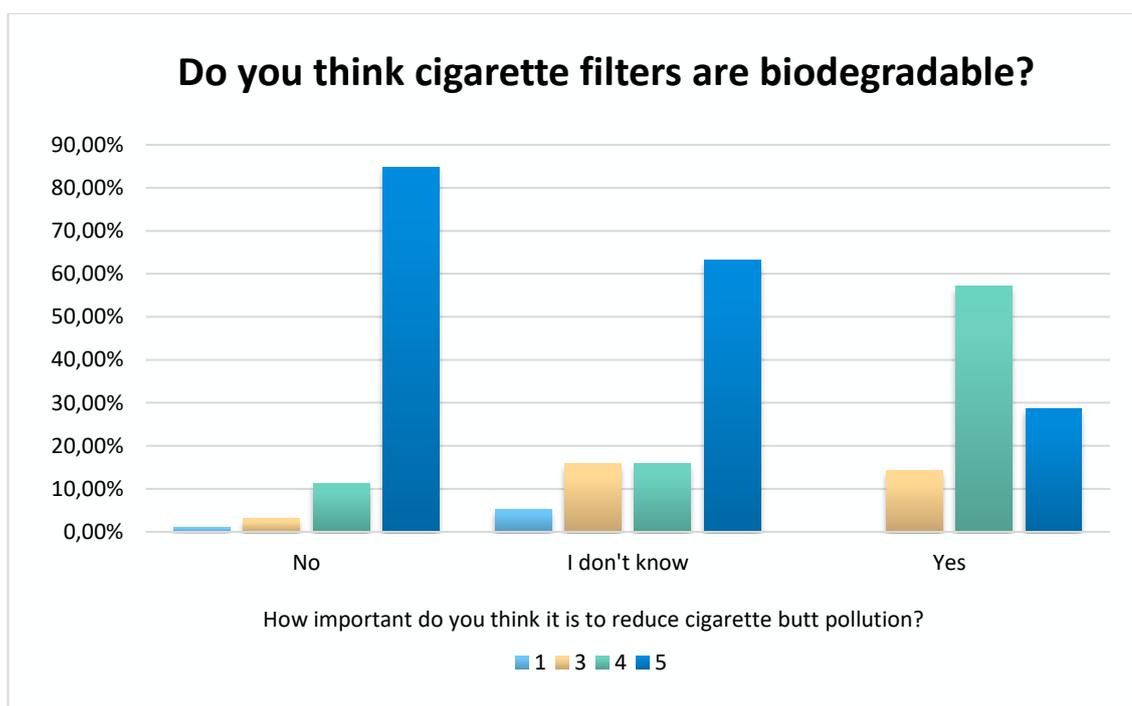


FIGURE 6. Importance of cigarette butt pollution and opinion on biodegradability of filters

According to the data collected, the more a person is aware of cigarette butt pollution the important it is for the person to reduce the cigarette butt pollution: of the people not at all aware of the risks of cigarette butt pollution only 50% believe that is extremely important to reduce it, while 97.6% of the people completely aware of the risks of cigarette butt pollution find tackling it extremely important.

When asked if Ballot Bins could help prevent cigarette butt pollution, 41.9% of the people interviewed said yes, 46% said maybe and 12.1%. Gender and age group.

Around half of the females (49%) interviewed answered maybe and 39.6% answered yes, while a lower percentage of male (18.7%) said maybe and a higher percentage (62.5%) said yes. Regarding the age group, only 17% of people over 50 believe that Ballot Bins could help reduce cigarette butt pollution, while respectively 44% of people between 30 and 50 and 57.6% of people under 30 find Ballot Bin a good prevention method.

The answers to the question “What are the reasons you/others toss cigarette butts on the ground?” are displayed in the graph below (Figure 7).

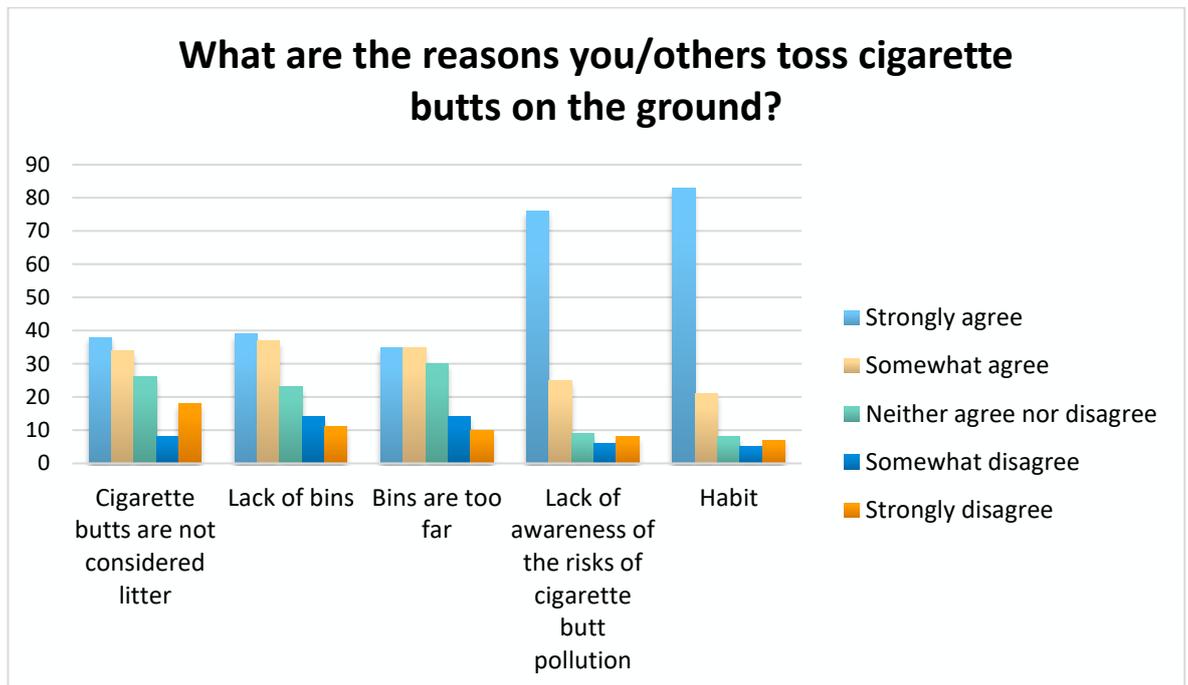


FIGURE 7. What are the reasons you/others toss cigarette butts on the ground?

Habit is the reason most people (83) strongly agree with, followed by lack of awareness of the risks of cigarette butt pollution (76 votes). When considering the most disagreed option, the reason “cigarette butts are not considered litter” reached 18 “strongly disagree” votes and 8 “somewhat disagree”.

Lastly, the following graph (Figure 8.) represents the answers to the question: “What other measures against cigarette butt pollution would be effective in your opinion?”.

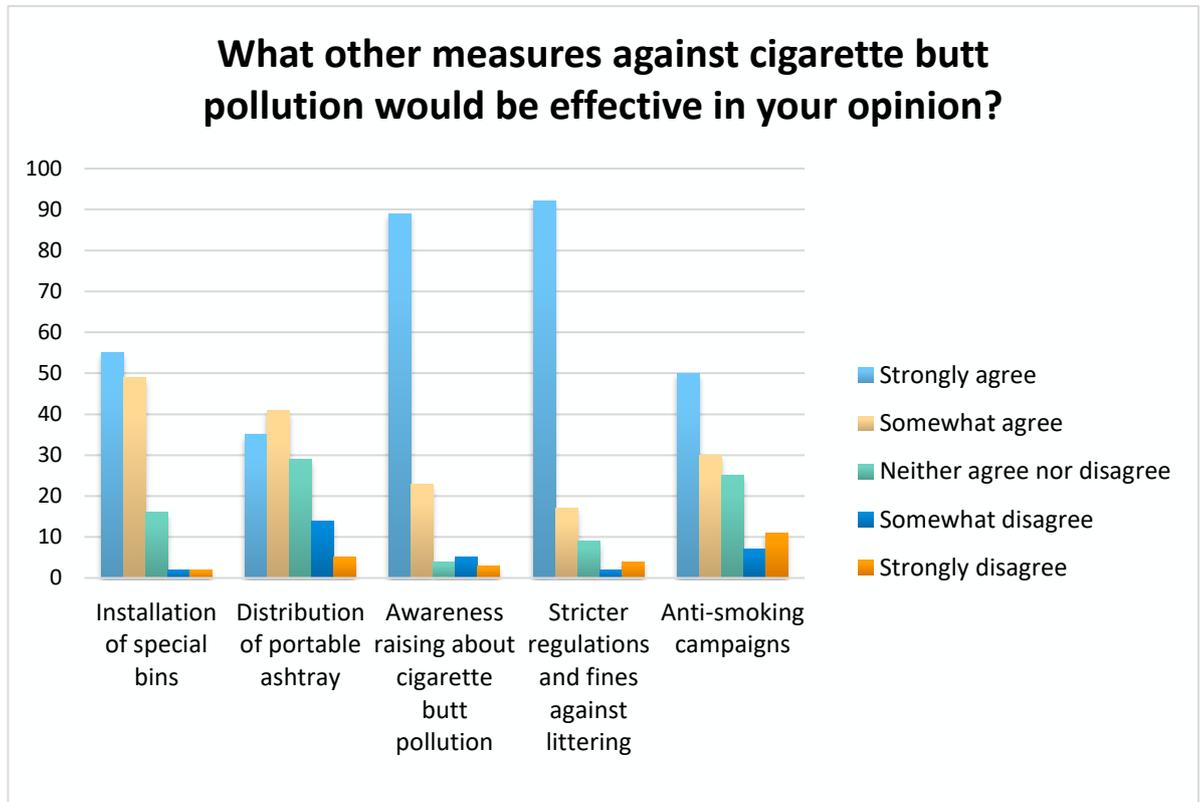


FIGURE 8. What other measures against cigarette butt pollution would be effective in your opinion?

Most people strongly agree with the statement that stricter regulations and fines against littering (92 votes) and awareness raising about cigarette butt pollution (89 votes) would be effective measure to combat cigarette butt pollution. On the other hand, anti-smoking campaign seems to be the measure the interviewees believe the least effective (11 people strongly disagree and 7 somewhat disagree), together with the distribution of portable ashtrays (5 strongly disagree and 14 somewhat disagree).

## **6 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Reliability of the study**

As mentioned in the methods section, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the survey carried out with the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the “Bin your Butt” campaign was planned according to the restrictions imposed by the Cypriot government, as a consequence it wasn’t done in person but through social media. This might have influenced the results of the survey since people who follow “Let’s make Cyprus green” probably have interest in topics such as waste reduction and sustainability, they might not represent the full spectrum of the people living in Cyprus and might be biased.

### **6.2 Effectiveness of “Bin your butt” campaign**

Awareness regarding cigarette butt pollution is the first step in fighting it and from the data collected it emerged that some groups were less aware compared to others. Firstly, the male population seems to be less aware and consequentially they also give less importance in reducing cigarette butt pollution. Another interesting fact that emerges from the survey is that older people are far more aware than younger people regarding the risks of cigarette butt pollution, according to the data people under 30 claim to have little knowledge on the topic and believe that it is not so important to reduce cigarette butt pollution. Furthermore, when cross-analysing the occupation and the importance given in reducing cigarette butt pollution, students resulted as the group that believed it was the least important, confirming the data regarding younger people. Smokers and occasional smokers form another group which can be considered as little aware on the risks and on the importance of reducing cigarette butt pollution.

The survey pointed out that males, people under 30 and smokers are the least aware groups, but it also showed that males and people under 30 are the groups which more believe Ballot Bins could help prevent cigarette butt pollution. As a consequence, this proves that the “Bin your butt” campaign is effective as it targets the right groups.

The people interviewed identified habit and lack of awareness as the main reasons of cigarette butt pollution, result that reflects the findings of a similar research done in the Baltic sea beaches (Kataržytė et al. 2020). Habit as cause of cigarette butt pollution was identified also in the study “Whose butt is it? tobacco industry research about smokers and cigarette butt waste” (Smith & Novotny, 2011). A correlation can be found between the reasons of cigarette butt pollution and the measures suggested from the interviewees: in fact, the measures considered more effective are awareness raising regarding cigarette butt pollution and stricter regulations and fines against littering. Awareness raising is the best action against the problem of lack of awareness while stricter regulations and fines are the logical way of fighting the habit of polluting. These results are in line with the conclusions from the study “. A systematic review on cigarette butt management as a hazardous waste and prevalent litter: control and recycling”, as they both suggest awareness raising and stricter regulations and fines as some of the most effective measures in tackling cigarette butt pollution (Torkashvand et al. 2019). “Let’s make Cyprus green” is effectively addressing the issue of lack of awareness by educating people through social media and by installing anti-littering signs as part of “Bin your butt” campaigns, on the other hand, the suggested measure regarding stricter regulations has not been addressed yet by the NGO due to lack of personnel.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Survey

4/18/2021

Bin your butt

#### Bin your butt

The data collected from this survey will be used for research purposes (Thesis for Tampere University of Applied Sciences).

\*Required

1. Gender? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

2. How old are you? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Under 30
- 30 to 50
- Over 50

3. What is your occupation? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Student
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Retired

4/18/2021

Pin your ball

4. What is your education? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Elementary  
 High School  
 Vocational school  
 University  
 Post-graduate

5. Are you a resident in Cyprus or a tourist? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Resident  
 Frequent tourist  
 I have been to Cyprus but i am not a regular visitor  
 I have never been to Cyprus

6. How many months per year do you spend in Cyprus ?

*Mark only one oval.*

- 9 to 12 months  
 3 to 9 months  
 Less than 3 months

Cigarette pollution

7. Do you smoke? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Occasionally

4/18/2021

Bin your butt

8. If you do, where do you dispose of it when outdoors?

Mark only one oval.

- General waste bin  
 Ashtray  
 Toss it on the ground  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Where do you dispose of your cigarette if there is no waste bin around?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you think cigarette filters are biodegradable? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes  
 No  
 I don't know

11. How familiar are you with the risks of cigarette butt pollution? \*

Mark only one oval.

- 1      2      3      4      5  
Not at all                  Completely

12. Do you think cigarette butt pollution is a problem in Cyprus? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes  
 No  
 Maybe

13. How important do you think it is to reduce cigarette butt pollution? \*

Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely

14. What are the main reasons you/others toss cigarette butts on the ground? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Cigarette butts are not considered as litter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of bins	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bins are too far	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of awareness of the risks of cigarette butt pollution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Habit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ballot bin

- 15. Ballot Bins display a question with a choice of two answers. Smokers vote by putting their cigarette butt in the slot below their preferred answer. The litter stacks up behind the clear glass front in two columns, showing which answer is more popular. Do you think ballot bins can help prevent cigarette butt pollution?



Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

- 16. If you used a ballot bin, what do you think about it?

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17. What other measures against cigarette butt pollution would be effective in your opinion? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Installation of special bins	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Distribution of portable ashtrays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Awareness raising about cigarette butt pollution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stricter regulations and fine against littering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anti-smoking campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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