To reduce cigarette butt littering, it is important to reduce cigarette smoking. BAT plays no role in shaping the strategies and goals of reducing butt litter. So why then is the Trust equally adamant that it will limit its efforts to education and not join with other organisations to try and reduce the number of cigarettes being smoked, and then available to be discarded as litter?

All anti-litter campaigns openly embrace three broad strategies: reducing use, recycling and education to “do the right thing”. Serious anti-litter organisations campaign to reduce packaging such as plastic bags, and lobby for bottle deposit legislation and tougher fines for littering. The Butt Littering Trust deliberately limits itself to education. Imagine how seriously the community would regard a plastic bag manufacturer setting up a Trust to educate shoppers not to discard bags, while lobbying hard to oppose any reduction in bag use. This is exactly analogous to what BAT is doing through the Trust. Grantees are warned that all communication with the public must adhere to the Trust’s key messages, with all public statements being vetted for “consistency in messages”. Don’t even think about urging smokers to quit.

OPPOSING OUTSIDE SMOKING BAN

But it gets worse. Along with long-time tobacco industry ally the Australian Hotels Association, the Trust has recently opposed moves by Newcastle City Council to ban smoking at outside alfresco restaurant and cafe tables where many non-smokers have complained that they must sit cheek-by-jowl with smokers who are not permitted to smoke indoors. The Trust argues that smoking bans have caused smokers to move outdoors, where many discard their butts.

The wider view is that reduced smoking opportunities mean reduced smoking. When smokers cannot smoke in particular settings, they smoke fewer cigarettes. When fewer cigarettes are smoked, fewer cigarettes are available to be dropped on the ground and less disease is caused as well.

Reducing the prevalence of smoking would do more than any other strategy to reduce butt pollution. In the 1960s, nearly 70% of Australian men and around 30% of women smoked. Today, just over 17% smoke everyday. The only people who discard butts are smokers. Thirty per cent of all Australian adults used to discard butts and now never do, because they are ex-smokers. Effective tobacco control reduces both the number of smokers in the community and the amount of cigarettes smoked per day by continuing smokers. It controls butt littering at source, because it reduces the number of “sources” who each have on average some 6200 butts to dispose of each year.

Trying to persuade smokers to be more considerate, and law enforcement of anti-littering provisions, are two important components of butt reduction efforts. But they are minor, band-aid contributors to the problem at large. BAT has a naked conflict of interest in addressing the litter question. The Butt Littering Trust directors are either willing or naively unwitting allies in this sham. Tobacco control advocates in Australia are now working with some success with local government authorities to alert them to the broader agenda of tobacco industry sponsored anti-litter campaigns.


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Correspondence to: Professor Simon Chapman, School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Building A 27, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia; Simon.chapman@health.usyd.edu.au

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