BUUTINEOUT

A qualitative analysis of the responses to tobacco product waste

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Background

Littering of nearly five trillion cigarette butts each year despoils public settings and presents a major environmental threat. Understanding how smokers and non-smokers perceive strategies for dealing with tobacco product waste (TPW) would provide important guidance to policy makers.

Methods:

We conducted in-depth interviews with diverse participants recruited using social media platforms and community advertising, and probed how smokers (n=16) and non- or former smokers (n=18) evaluated ten measures that could address TPW.

Results:

Fines for people littering

Favoured by non-smokers but seen as a low enforcement priority, though with

you're enforcing it a 100% of the time. It just changes the stigma around the behaviour." (Aaron, FS)

Individual Responsibility



potential to change social norms.

"Having a law doesn't necessarily mean that

Banning smoking in outdoor areas

Regarded as difficult to enforce and potentially likely to increase smoking in private settings.

"In hindsight it probably would be too hard... Unless there were ... enough designated areas to make it work." (Quinn, NS)

Considered unlikely to attract most

smokers' attention but could influence some and had few downsides.

"I don't know how many smokers (Heidi, NS)

Education programmes

Perceived as innocuous and non-threatening, but unlikely to be effective.

"Education programmes are great, but when the need is greater... We need something more and bigger." (Una, NS)

\$2 refund on returned butts

Seen by smokers as insufficiently motivating and likely to create stigma, but supported by non-smokers.

"I just don't think people would either worry about the two dollars, or collect all their butts... I just don't think two dollars would, would matter to a lot of people." (Myra, NS)

"I think it's good... because it makes them more driven to dispose of them correctly, and actually gets the beginning of the thought process going about their littering" (Jules, S)

On-pack labels

actually read the labels, but if it did help... at least one person, then [it'd] be worth putting them on the packs."

Biodegradable filters

Generally supported by smokers and non-smokers as pragmatic would reduce harm without requiring behaviour change.

"...it sort of says like, 'Yeah, you don't have to stop smoking, but here's a way that it's okay to ... be absent minded and flick it and leave it'." (Bree, FS)

Attracted less support as moves responsibility

product that is damaging the environment, and the people in the environment, so they can pay for it. Um ... It's not as simple as that, though..." (Hera, S)

companies

Lower support from smokers and non-smokers who preferred measures affecting individuals, though seen by some as likely to stimulate innovation.

Fee based on litter costs levied on tobacco

"Litter is really down to the individual and if it can operate ... at that high government to corporate level, then the individual never really gets impacted by it." (Evie,

Producer Responsibility

Law requiring tobacco companies to fund TPW clean-up

away from end-users, though seen by some as introducing a more appropriate balance.

"They're making enough money. They're selling a



Levy on tobacco products to fund clean-up Uncertain effects as link with TPW may not be obvious.

"...it's a charge that would come through... the smokers themselves aren't even gonna see what it's for, so it's not necessarily going to impact whether they drop their butts or not." (Gina, S)

Prohibiting filter sales

Not favoured by smokers who perceived a right to use filters but seen by non-smokers as an effective solution.

"people will start defending the sale of filters as a health, health and safety device." (Aidan, S)

Conclusions

Tobacco companies know filters are not bio-degradable, yet have framed smokers as responsible for TPW; this approach has influenced public perceptions. Raising awareness of the harms filters cause and the costs of managing TPW could foster public support for producer responsibility policies, and support the eventual introduction of those policies.

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Conflict of interest statement

There are no conflicts of interest to report.





