4 ways tobacco is devastating the environment

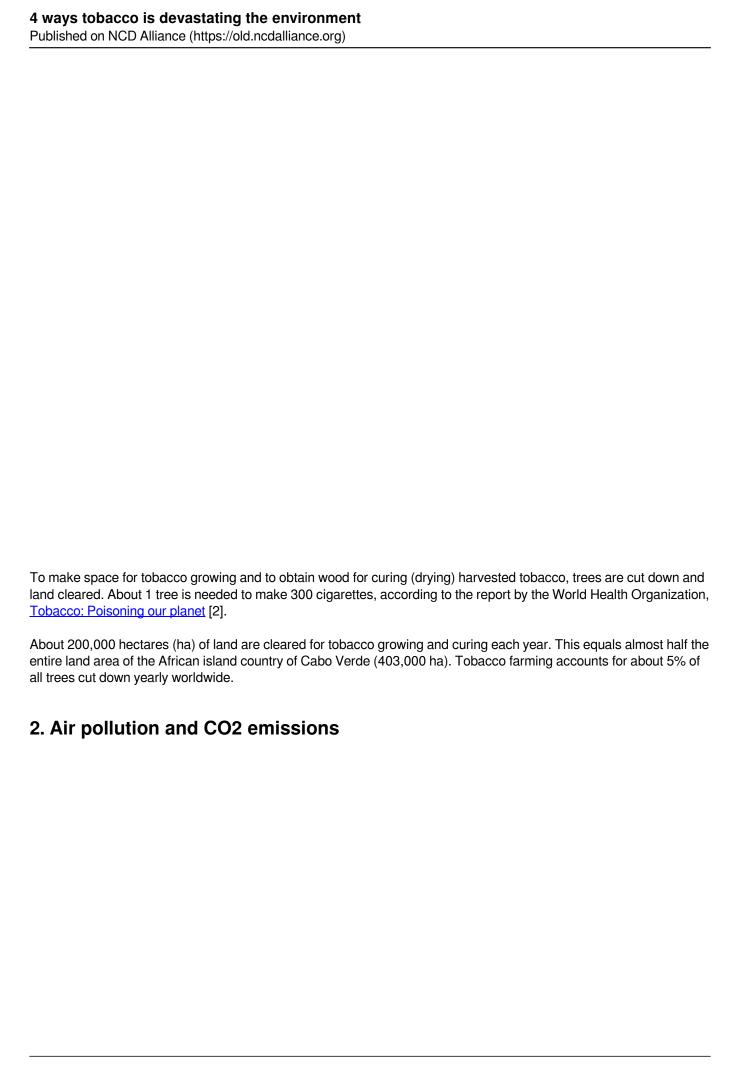
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We've known for decades that tobacco is the only legal consumer product that kills up to half its users — about <u>8</u> million people per year [1]. A recent report identifies the key ways in which it also devastates the environment.

1. Deforestation and land degradation



Published on NCD Alliance (https://old.ncdalliance.org)

Tobacco smoke contains three major greenhouse gases (CO2, methane and nitrous oxides), as well as other air pollutants. It produces up to 10 times as much particle matter pollution — microscopic solids or liquid droplets that can be inhaled — as diesel exhaust. In 2014, cigarette manufacturing generated 84 megatons of CO2 emissions. That's the equivalent of one-fifth of the CO2 produced by the airline industry each year.

3. Use of scarce water resources

Every year, about 22 billion tonnes of water are used in tobacco production globally. This is the amount found in 15 million Olympic-sized swimming pools, or roughly the volume of water that flows in the Amazon, the largest river in the world, in one day. Tobacco production requires up to eight times more water than tomatoes or potatoes. For every kilogram of tobacco that is not produced, consumed and disposed of, the potable water needs of one person can be met for an entire year.

4. Massive generation of waste

These include the waste produced by smoking (which generates cigarette butts) and the use of new smokeless products. Toxic, hazardous waste E-cigarettes and other nicotine delivery products contain metals, plastics and batteries. These are classified as toxic hazardous waste whether they are littered into the environment or disposed of in a waste bin. Cellulose-acetate-based cigarette filters do not biodegrade and can remain in the environment for long periods of time in the form of microplastics, which could cause major harm to aquatic environments and ecosystems. The filters also release into ecosystems nicotine, heavy metals and other chemicals that they have absorbed. This in turn affects the livelihood and health of fishing communities in coastal areas, and those who eat seafood affected by

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the contamination.

Greenwashing industry's image

The report also notes how the tobacco industry 'greenwashes' its image using many tactics.

"One example is the marketing and eco-labelling of cigarettes as 'natural' or 'organic', suggesting to smokers that these products are somehow less harmful."

So-called 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) activities are another way the industry deflects attention from tobacco's deadly impacts to its supposed 'good deeds'. "However, the industry's self-reported data are intended to mislead the public and sustain its operations in tobacco-growing countries, and lack essential information on the sheer size of destruction imposed on the environment and communities," says the report.

How to fight for the earth



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Published on NCD Alliance (https://old.ncdalliance.org)

Post Date: Thursday, 23 June, 2022

Tags: tobacco [4]

Category - News: Feature

Search Keywords: pollution, environment, smoking, tobacco, greenwashing, CSR

Source URL: https://old.ncdalliance.org/news-events/news/4-ways-tobacco-is-devastating-the-environment

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