

How E-Cigarettes and Vapes Create Electronic Environmental Waste

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March 2,
2020



While traditional cigarettes have been alarming environmental and health activists for many years, e-cigarettes and vapes are part of a new category of concern. E-cigarettes and their adjacent pods are environmental and electronic waste.

Because they are made of plastic, these items break down into smaller plastics and pollute the environment. Nick Mallos, senior director of the Trash Free Seas program at Ocean Conservancy, told ABC News that alongside cigarette trash on beaches, e-cigarette products are also starting to show, “Our hypothesis would be that — as we see this shift to e-cigarettes and cartridges that in the coming years — we unfortunately expect to see more and more of these products on the beaches, unless some intervention is made.”

Because e-cigarettes are still new, limited data exists compared to other tobacco products. Scientists are worried about the nicotine residue, liquid and flavoring in the devices, as well as the devices themselves. Battery-powered e-cigarettes are also a problem because they

pose fire risks at waste and recycling facilities.

But a significant number of adults still use the products, which means an excess of plastic in the environment. 6.7 million adults said they used electronic tobacco products in 2017. Five million high school students said they had used them, too.

Manufacturers do not include recycling or waste information for e-cigarettes and recycling company TerraCycle said that a recycling program targeting the products has been less than successful.

Heidi Sanborn, executive director of the National Stewardship Action Council, has been working on a bill in California to increase recycling rates of e-cigarettes. A spokesperson for popular e-cigarette Juul said the company is increasing their recycling and takeback programs and tells customers to dispose of cartridges properly.

According to Sanborn, " That has to get back up to the front end. We've got to turn the spigot off. They need to be designing things that are more durable, repairable and reusable. And then, if you can't do any of those things anymore, there has to be a plan for end of life. We can't continue to do make, waste, dispose, make waste, dispose. There's only one planet."

There are products you may be using or habits you may have that contribute to plastic pollution. Learn more about how the use of Teabags, Cotton Swabs, Laundry, Contact Lenses, Glitter and Sheet Masks pollute our oceans so you can make more informed decisions going forward. There are also numerous simple actions and switches that can help cut plastic out of our lives including, making your own cosmetics, shampoo, toothpaste, soap, household cleaners, using mason jars, reusable bags/bottles/straws, and avoiding microbeads!

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