



# cte POLICY INITIATIVE 1

## Upstream Approaches to Preventing Commercial Tobacco Product Waste

### THE PROBLEM

Tobacco product waste (TPW) is the discarded material from commercial tobacco consumption. When tobacco product waste breaks down, it leaches heavy metals, cancer-causing chemicals, nicotine, and microplastics into the surrounding soil or water. In fact, cigarette butts are the most littered plastic item in the world.

Many “downstream” or “midstream” solutions, such as cleaning up tobacco product waste or banning smoking in outdoor areas, are important but only address the impacts of tobacco products that have already been sold. Local municipalities often bear the high cost of keeping streets, sidewalks, parks, and playgrounds free of waste because it reaccumulates so quickly. In 2023, a study of tobacco product waste in San Diego County found that 96% of the waste collected had reaccumulated within two months. “Upstream” solutions like plastic cigarette filter bans target the root cause of the problem.

### OVERVIEW

We plan to carry out two Rapid Response Projects focused on tobacco product waste. Our goal is to evaluate the acceptability of proactive upstream strategies and document the local environmental and psychosocial effects of tobacco waste, while involving youth and neighborhood groups throughout the process.

#### RRP #1

**Assess what Californians think about tobacco product waste in their community.**

- What do Californians know about the impacts of tobacco product waste?
- What do Californians think about upstream solutions to tobacco product waste?
- How do Californians feel about policy enforcement?

#### | How We Will Do It

- Conduct an online survey of California residents.
- Conduct an in-person survey of San Diego priority populations.

#### RRP #2

**Assess the local environmental and psychosocial impact of tobacco product waste.**

- Are local parks, landscaped areas, and nature preserves impacted by tobacco product waste pollution?

#### | How We Will Do It

- Collect water and soil samples from local parks, landscaped areas, and nature preserves.
- Analyze sample for signature chemicals from tobacco product waste (e.g., nicotine).
- Survey, count, and map tobacco product waste in areas of interest to the community, for example, playgrounds or bus stops
- Interview local residents about how tobacco product waste affects their community.

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