The four top types of litter and what we can do about it



Did you know litter has increased by 500% since the 1960s?

And it's causing big problems.

Not only does litter look unattractive, but around the world one million birds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die each year when they become trapped in plastic or eat it.

So let's look at some of the most common types of litter and some of the simple 'zero waste' fixes.

Chewing Gum

In my new Waste Warriors course I've dedicated an entire bonus lesson to talking about chewing gum, after discovering it was one of the biggest causes of litter, costing the government millions of pounds to clear up each year.

Chewing gum the second most commonly dropped litter and local councils are spending around 60million pounds per year removing gum from our pavements.

We've been chewing gum for millennia – we used to chew the sap of certain trees. But our love of chewing gum grew and we started to manufacturer it from a rubbery equivalent called polyisobutylene. This material is also used in the manufacturer of the inner tubes of tyres – yum! It's mixed with plasticisers, flavourings and colourings and doesn't biodegrade.

With 50% of us enjoying chewing gum, we don't have to give it up in order to be a waste warrior! Fortunately some brands offer 'natural' chewing gum which breaks down in the natural

environment or on a compost heap – these include Peppersmith, Chicza, Chewsy and Simply Gum.

Cigarette Butts

Smoking litter is the most commonly dropped litter. It's such an issue that Keep Britain Tidy and DEFRA have created a 30 page document with guidelines for local authorities.

Cigarette litter is time consuming to clean up because it is small and tends to get trapped in cracks and grates on the ground. In London alone, six million cigarette butts are dropped every year and the City spends £3.8 million cleaning them up.

Cigarette filters can take up to 12 years to degrade and cigarette butts leak toxins that contaminate water and harm marine life and the environment. I was shocked to discover that, according to CIWM, cigarette filters have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures, who mistake them for food.

With 15% of adults smoking, this habit isn't going to stop any time soon, so if you're a waste warrior, why not switch to a vape. We all know we'd be better off without a nicotine habit, but if you still need your daily fix, a vape is a more waste aware way to get your quota. Even the NHS and Public Health England are now publishing reports on the positive aspects of vaping, including how they are successfully used by many as an aid to quitting the habit. So you never know, you might be able to be completely zero waste soon!

Confectionery wrappers

As well as our nicotine and chewing gum habits, many of us crave chocolate or crisps at some point during the day. Over the years I've seen how many confectionery brands have switched their packaging to something LESS zero waste. Once upon a time you could find a few chocolate bars and sweets in

fully recyclable or biodegradable packaging such as paper or cardboard, but it's coming far less easy to find those brands.

So vote with your money and support the brands that support your zero waste lifestyle, or if you can't go without your favourite bag of crisps and chocolate bar, set up a recycling brigade with Terracycle and be sure to recycle your packaging. Check out this article for some brands of sweets and chocolate that come in recyclable packaging.

And how's this for a brilliant story – a shop keeper in a small village wrote the names of the children who bought confectionery bars, so if she found them as litter she knew who had dropped them! Within a couple of weeks litter had reduced by an impressive 40%. Litter louts who dropped their rubbish were shown the evidence and temporarily banned from her shop or told to go on a litter-pick.

Drinks bottles and cans

Let's be honest, there's no excuse for this one! If you buy a bottle of soft drink every lunch time then you're spending an insane amount of money. An average worker in the UK spends £3.69 on lunch which will most likely include a bottle of drink. And it doesn't stop there! The average household in the UK is spending upwards of £100 per year on their habit – buying large bottles of drink with their weekly shop. And an interesting article in inews stated that children aged between seven and 15 are now spending more on soft drinks than toys.

There are two easy options which will save you money AND reduce waste. First, buy a reusable bottle and take your own water wherever you go – I have an entire section dedicated to reusable drinking bottles in my Amazon shop – if you buy from there, I get a small commission which helps to run this site; please and thank you! You can find free water refill stations all over the place from tube stations to cafes. Check out Refill for places near you. The second option is invest in

a Soda Stream. This means you can still enjoy the taste of soft drinks for a fraction of the price and without much waste.

What about you? I know you wouldn’t drop litter, but how would you reduce the litter problem?

Thanks to ‘My Zero Waste’ for sharing this article.
https://myzerowaste.com