

Diving Deeper: Cigarette Butts Are Even Worse for the Ocean Than Plastic Straws

By [Rebecca Fernandez](#) | November 5, 2018 at 7:12 PM EST - Updated November 5 at 9:09 PM

SARASOTA (WWSB) - You've probably heard about the growing effort to ban plastic straws, but according to experts, there's an even worse pollutant - also made of plastic - that has caused harm to our beaches and our environment for years.

"There is a study out from Keep America Beautiful that shows that cigarette butts are the number one littered item in America," Wendi Crisp, the Executive Director of Keep Sarasota County Beautiful, told us.

The plastic in cigarette filters can take decades to decompose, so a few years ago, Sarasota County tried to ban smoking on Suncoast beaches and in public parks..

"But the unfortunate thing about that ban, is that the state of Florida decided that cities and counties should not have the authority to ban smoking outdoors," explained John Holic, the Mayor of Venice.

Now, Florida is one of only eight states that allows smoking on its beaches.

"Cigarette butts are actually one of the biggest littered items that we find here in Sarasota County. We typically find upwards of tens of thousands of cigarette butts in a one day cleanup event in probably about 30 locations around the county," said Crisp.

Keep Sarasota County Beautiful hosts three annual cleanups at popular public spots. The organization says each of its volunteers typically collects nearly 4,000 cigarette butts each day.

"It's not a new phenomenon. For some reasons, smokers feel like they have a right to litter. They don't even think about it. They just throw their cigarette out, and the beach becomes a huge ash tray.. the parks become huge ash trays... and the streets become huge ash trays. Until we can change that mentality and have people take responsibility for their own actions, the

only thing we can do is pass laws to correct it. The state is refusing for us to do that, so now it has to be educational," said Mayor Holic.

In 2017, *Keep Sarasota County Beautiful* received a \$5,000 grant for "The Cigarette Litter Prevention Program". It used that money to install more than 50 ash receptacles, placing them on all Suncoast beaches and in many parks. Local restaurants have even joined the effort.

"We actually do it in all three of our restaurants because all three of them are located on water. Keeping clean water ways, whether it's the beaches or rivers, it's all really important. Us, with our locations, it's really important for us to help out whichever way we can," said Justin Pachota, a Co-owner of Sharkey's on the Pier in Venice. Since the initiation of the program last year, Sarasota County has seen a 78% decrease in cigarette litter.

"Certainly, having those receptacles available for people to use them and they're marked clearly, so there is educational information on them, and then we've also run some awareness campaigns as well with some banners on the beaches. I think all of those things, working together, has helped us with the decrease in cigarette litter," said Crisp.

Keep Sarasota County Beautiful is also offering two items for free to residents and visitors: an ash tray for your car that can fit perfectly into your cup holder and a bag where you can store used cigarettes until you find the right place to dispose.

This reusable water bottle will help rid plastic from our oceans, its creator says

The Ocean Bottle will go one step further than just providing an alternative to



Will Pearson, 24, collecting plastic from shores (*The Ocean Bottle*)

A London-based entrepreneur has joined the war on plastic by launching a reusable water bottle that he claims will help clear plastic from our oceans.

William Pearson, 24, has designed the Ocean Bottle after seeing the effects plastic can have on our waters after sailing around the world for eight months after graduating from university.

In London alone, plastic bottles are a main contributor to pollution of our surroundings, with 10 per cent of shoreline litter on the Thames being made up of plastic bottles in 2017.

During his travels, Will sailed to the Maldives where he was shocked to discover an artificial island brimming with landfill called Thilafushi - otherwise known as 'Rubbish Island'.

"The day we arrived it was a rainy, horrible day, and off in the distance I could see this smouldering smoke."

After asking his chief officer on the ship where the smoke was coming from, he explained it was 'Rubbish Island'.

"They collect all the plastic from the resorts and pile them up and burn them. It all drips off into the ocean. There's nothing to control the plastic waste.

"I just thought: We are in this amazing place and this is happening. It can't be right."

The Maldives is not the only country that ships its plastic waste to be disposed of – with the UK being one of the worst offenders. Since China imposed a ban on plastic imports last year, exports from the UK to Malaysia and Thailand rose sharply according to research from Greenpeace.

When he returned to the UK, Will decided he wanted to find a way to encourage people to collect the plastic already contaminating our oceans, while also asking them to stop using single-use plastic.

This was when he discovered The Plastic Bank, a Norwegian-based organisation which pays people in poor communities all over the world to collect plastic.

After meeting with the organisation, Will partnered with The Plastic Bank in developing his stainless steel, reusable bottle. The model for the bottle itself was created by K8Industridesign.

The Ocean Bottle will cost £30 when it is launched. Its makers say that the equivalent of \$5 USD from every bottle will be donated to The Plastic Bank – which they claim will help fund the collection of 11kg of plastic from oceans around the world. That is the equivalent of 1,000 plastic bottles.

The company also describes itself as a “social enterprise” which means it will be donating 50 per cent of all its profits to The Plastic Bank or other projects.

"There are so many people coming out of the woodwork with solutions to the plastic problem but really they're not doing that much.

"We want to up the ante and make a real tangible impact where it matters," Will said.

China Reverses Ban on Rhino and Tiger Parts in Medicine, Worrying Activists



Image

Seized rhinoceros horns and other animal parts at the Department of Wildlife and National Parks headquarters in Kuala Lumpur in August. Credit: Manan Vatsyayana/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

BEIJING — The Chinese government, reversing a 25-year ban, announced on Monday that it would allow the use of rhinoceros horns and tiger bones in medicine, a move that environmentalists described as a significant setback for efforts to protect the animals from extinction.

The State Council, China's cabinet, said in a [policy directive](#) that it would legalize the use of rhino horns and tiger bones for “medical research or in healing,” but only by certified hospitals and doctors, and only from rhinos and tigers raised in captivity, excluding zoo animals. While such remedies are highly profitable, they have no proven benefits to humans. Environmentalists said the decision would likely help fuel a black market for wild rhino and tiger parts, which are revered in traditional Chinese medicine for supposed healing powers, and could lead to increased poaching of the fewer than 30,000 rhinos and 3,900 tigers still in

the wild. “It’s a devastating decision,” said Leigh Henry, director of wildlife policy at the [World Wildlife Fund](#) in Washington. “I can’t overstate the potential impact.”

With only around 3,900 left in the wild, every tiger counts. But China’s latest move to lift the ban on tiger bone trade threatens to put a dark cloud over the world’s wild 🐅 The announcement on Monday threatened to undermine President Xi Jinping’s efforts to promote an image of China as a responsible environmental steward capable of tackling global issues like climate change and air pollution.

“A small number of individuals stand to make a lot of money perhaps at the price of the species,” said Peter Knights, chief executive of WildAid, an environmental advocacy group based in San Francisco. He added that the decision “comes completely out of the blue and with no rationale.”

In 2016, China, along with the United States, [announced that it would ban](#) the sale of ivory. China’s domestic ban, which went into effect earlier this year, was [widely applauded](#) as a critical step in ending elephant poaching in Africa.

Now, just as prices for rhino horn are decreasing and populations of tigers seem to be stabilizing, the environmental advocates say, China threatens to hurt that progress. Chinese officials on Monday did not draw attention to the reversal of the rhino horn and tiger bone bans, put in place in 1993, nor did they explain the decision.

Experts said the move was probably related to the government’s efforts to encourage the growth of traditional Chinese medicine, an industry valued at more than \$100 billion, with more than 500,000 medical practitioners.

While leaders of traditional Chinese medicine have officially discouraged the use of rhino horn and tiger bone for years, an underground trade has continued.

Rhino horn is used in Chinese medicine to treat a variety of conditions, including fevers, gout and food poisoning. Tiger bone, often turned into tiger bone wine or so-called glue, is thought to boost health, cure a range of ailments and increase virility for men. Endangered animal parts are not widely used in traditional Chinese medicine, but folk remedies incorporating them form a small but profitable market.

Mr. Xi has used Chinese medicine as a way to expand China’s overseas influence, and his government has promoted it in places like Zimbabwe and Nepal. The government hopes Chinese medicine will win global acceptance alongside Western therapies.

The [Chinese state media sought to portray](#) Monday’s policy announcement as an effort to help protect rhinos and tigers by improving oversight. The regulations said that trade of rhinos, tigers and their related products was illegal, except for a handful of purposes, including medicine, scientific research and “cultural exchanges.”

The State Council said in the announcement that the medical use of rhino and tiger parts would be strictly monitored. Only doctors certified by the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine would be allowed to administer the medicines.

China is estimated to have 6,500 tigers in captivity as of 2010, according to the World Wildlife Fund, though the number of rhinos in captivity is unknown.

Experts said the number of animals in captivity that could be used for medicinal purposes would likely not meet the demand in China, potentially leading to increased poaching and a thriving underground trade.