

Tobacco 101- Environmental Impacts

Commercial tobacco-related deforestation, single-use plastics, and hazardous waste threaten our planet. After today's lesson, students will understand how commercial tobacco products harm the environment and how the tobacco industry continues to "greenwash" their image.



Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Summarize key facts about how tobacco products harm the environment; and
- Define the term "Greenwashing" and how the tobacco industry uses it to protect their image.

<i>Materials Needed:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer with internet access or computer with USB drive that contains the three videos used in this chapter. • Copies of Environmental Impacts factsheet • Copies of the newspaper <u>article</u> • Paper • Writing utensils • Whiteboard markers
<i>Overview of Lesson</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm-up and Introduction: 5 minutes • Video & Discussion: 25 minutes • Factsheet & Discussion: 10 minutes • 'Greenwashing' Activity: 15 minutes • Exit Ticket: 5 minutes <div style="border: 2px solid #e91e63; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; margin-top: 10px;">Total Time: 60 minutes</div>
<i>Before the Lesson</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare the warm-up question to be ready for the students as they walk into class. • Double-check the sound for the video. If streaming the video from YouTube, ensure you have a working internet connection. • Have the discussion questions posted on the board.

Factsheet and Discussion

Total Time: 10 minutes

Have a student pass out the Environmental Impacts factsheet (next page).

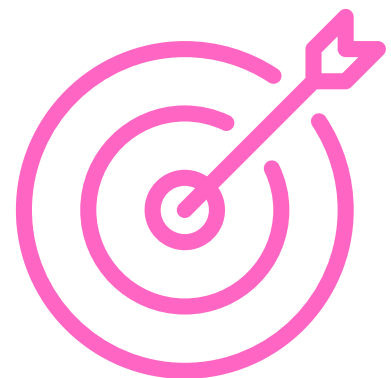
Ask students to read through the factsheet.

After students have finished reading the document, ask them to turn and tell their neighbor one thing they learned from the factsheet that surprised them. Allow two minutes for this mini-discussion.

Call students back together and ask for volunteers to share what they learned with the larger group.

If students aren't volunteering responses, ask the following questions to prompt responses. Give students some time to think before you jump in with a response.

- What surprised you most from the factsheet?
- How do you feel about the tobacco industry's tactic of greenwashing?



HOW DO VAPES HARM THE ENVIRONMENT?

Vaping is not only harmful to your health, it is also harmful to the health of our planet. The production, manufacturing and disposal of vapes cause destruction and pollution that will have a lasting impact on Earth if we don't take action!

DEFORESTATION

Most nicotine comes from tobacco plants.³ **Millions of trees are cut down every year** by the tobacco industry so they can plant more tobacco.²



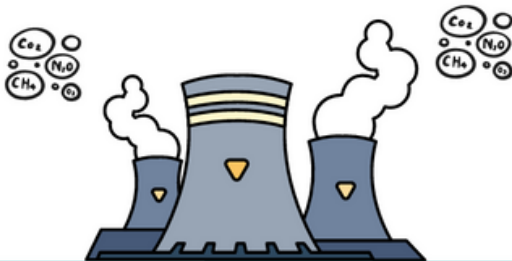
HAZARDOUS WASTE

Vapes are considered hazardous waste, meaning **vapes cannot be thrown in the regular trash or recycling bin**. Improper disposal harms our environment.¹



GREENHOUSE GASES

The manufacturing of vapes and deforestation from commercial tobacco farms contribute to an increase in greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. High greenhouse gas emissions have been linked to climate change.^{7,8}



HARMFUL CONTENTS

Vapes contain **nicotine**, which is hazardous waste. Improper disposal of nicotine can poison humans and wildlife, and pollute our soil and water.¹

Vapes also contain **lithium ion batteries**. If batteries are improperly disposed of, they can leak chemicals and pollute our soil and water as they degrade. Improperly disposed batteries have even caused fires in garbage and recycling trucks!⁹



THEY'RE WASTE!

Vapes are thrown out more frequently than before due to the rise in popularity of disposable vapes. Vapes are made with **metals, chemicals and plastic**, and these materials can take hundreds of years to decompose.⁹



DON'T LET THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY FOOL YOU!

The tobacco industry (which includes the vape industry) has a history of pretending to be environmentally friendly when they're really not. This is called **"greenwashing."**

Here are some examples...

Tobacco companies occasionally host **trash clean-up** events...¹

...but refuse to take responsibility for making some of the **most littered products in the world**.⁹

Tobacco companies claim to **plant trees**...⁴

...even though a few trees won't make up for the **millions of trees they cut down** every year.²

Tobacco companies use words like **"natural"** and **"earth-friendly"** to market some of their products...⁵

...even though there's nothing "natural" about **plastic filters, added chemicals, or deliberately harming the planet for profit**.^{6,11}

TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Educate your friends about the harm vapes do to the environment.
- ▶ Don't start vaping. If you do vape, learn about free quit programs so that when you're ready to quit, you know where to find help.
- ▶ Talk to adults in your life about the problem.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Tobacco Prevention
Advocacy Toolkits
(CYAN)



Tobacco and The
Environment
(Truth Initiative)



Tips for Safe Disposal
of E-Cigarettes and E-
Liquid Waste (FDA)



Free quit programs
for teenagers and
adults in Minnesota
(MDH)



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(2) A. (2015, April 20). Earth Day 2015 – The Unforeseen Consequences of Tobacco. ASH > Action on Smoking & Health. <https://ash.org/earthday2015/>

(3) American Cancer Society. (2022, June). What Do We Know About E-cigarettes? <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/e-cigarettes-vaping/what-do-we-know-about-e-cigarettes.html#:~:text=E%2Dcigarettes%20do%20not%20contain,them%20as%20%22tobacco%20products.%22>

(4) Greenwashing. (2022, July 12). TobaccoTactics. <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/greenwashing/>

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(9) Truth Initiative. (2019, March 20). Tobacco and the environment. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/tobacco-and-environment#:~:text=Cigarette%20butts%20cause%20pollution%20by,toxic%20to%20fish%20and%20microorganisms.>

(10) Why are cigarette butts the most littered item on earth? (2019, March 19). Truth Initiative. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/why-are-cigarette-butts-most-littered-item-earth>

(11) Why Natural American Spirit cigarettes could be especially dangerous. (2019, July 29). Truth Initiative. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/traditional-tobacco-products/why-natural-american-spirit-cigarettes-could-be>

'Greenwashing' Activity

Total Time: 15 minutes

Supply copies of the article **WHO accuses tobacco industry of 'greenwashing' in new report** by Tracy J. Wholf and Eric Fayeulle

<https://abcnews.go.com/Business/accuses-tobacco-industry-greenwashing-report/story?id=84602120>

Have students pass out copies of the article and highlighters.

Allow students to independently read the article.

Once students have completed reading the article, ask the students to summarize the article.

At this point, the goal is for the facilitator to let the students talk as much as possible. Ask the following questions to keep the discussion moving:

- **Where have you heard the term 'greenwashing' before?**
- **What are some of the environmental impacts discussed in this article?**
- **Whose responsibility do you think it is to help fix this problem?**
- **Do you think the tobacco industry is doing enough to reduce the environmental impact of their products? How could the tobacco industry reduce the environmental impact of their products?**
- **Can you think of other examples of the tobacco industry being dishonest?**



WHO accuses tobacco industry of 'greenwashing' in new report

The report outlines Big Tobacco's attempts to improve its image.

By [Tracy J. Wholf](#) and [Eric Fayeulle](#)

May 12, 2022, 10:28 AM

Share



Smoke plume rises above Santa Fe forest fire

The United States Forest Service shared footage of smoke plumes and other fire activity taken from Highway 283 in New Mexico.

Companies like British American Tobacco and Philip Morris International don't typically come to mind as environmental stewards. But [a new report](#) from the World Health Organization and STOP, a global tobacco watchdog, outlines how the tobacco industry has been working to rehabilitate its image by showcasing sustainability efforts that critics claim is a form of "greenwashing."

The term, which refers to a form of disinformation published by an organization to appear to be environmentally friendly, is a common practice in numerous industries.

"This kind of activity gives the impression that the tobacco industry is socially and environmentally responsible," the report warns. "Yet this industry is causing an incalculable toll

on health to smokers, non-smokers and farmers. And not only is tobacco harming humans, it is also damaging the environment.”



In this Dec. 6, 2021, file photo, a farmer carries a chainsaw at a coca plantation after cutting down trees to plant coca in Guaviare department, Colombia. Raul Arboleda/AFP via Getty Images, FILE

The report says its goal is to call on governments to ban tobacco industry greenwashing and to avoid partnerships with cigarette companies engaged in environmental activities that could promote the industry as an environmental partner.

The website of British American Tobacco (BAT), for example, promotes news releases with headlines such as, “BAT in Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for 20th Consecutive Year” and “BAT recognized as Climate Leader by the Financial Times.”

Philip Morris International (PMI) has a full sustainability landing page on its website that outlines everything from a low-carbon transition plan to “achieving a smoke-free future” that the company says can be done in a sustainable manner.

But critics have pointed out that many environmental, social and governance (ESG) rankings and accreditations, like the ones BAT and PMI promote on their websites, rarely consider a

company's end-product or service, in this case, ignoring the fact that tobacco products are harmful to human health, according to the report.

The report says there are more than 600 different ways to assess corporate ESG activity and there are no global, standardized disclosure requirements for companies to follow, which means businesses can edit sustainability data to promote a favorable outcome.

PMI declined to comment on the report because the company said it had not reviewed it yet.

"Some well-funded anti-tobacco lobbying groups with strong links to WHO are committed to shutting down debate and closing doors to cooperative efforts that can drive better outcomes for the world. We take a different approach. Philip Morris International (PMI) is fully in favor of complete disclosure and encourages open and honest, fact-based dialogue with all stakeholders," the company said in a statement to ABC News.

The statement added, "The company regularly shares updates on our sustainability objectives and achievements at [PMI.com/sustainability](https://www.pmi.com/sustainability). Our Integrated Report 2020 shows the progress we are making toward a world without cigarettes. (The company's forthcoming Integrated Report 2021 will be published on May 17, 2022.)"

BAT did not immediately respond to a request for comment from ABC News.

In addition to the greenwashing examples, the report highlights the ecological impact of the tobacco industry. Annually, 32 million tons of tobacco leaf is grown globally to produce 6 trillion cigarettes, the report notes.

It takes about 22 billion tons of water to grow the global crop, or the equivalent of 8.8 million Olympic-sized swimming pools, often in places where water is limited, the report says. It is estimated that nearly 1.5 billion acres of global forest have been lost to tobacco farming since the 1970s, according to the report.



In this undated stock photo, a cigarette butt is shown in the sand on a beach.
STOCK PHOTO/Getty Images

Electronic cigarettes are no less friendly to the earth, the report says.

The report notes that “e-cigarette waste is potentially a more serious environmental threat than cigarette butts since e-cigarettes introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, lead, mercury, and flammable lithium-ion batteries into waterways, soils and to wildlife.”

Among its recommendations, the report says it is calling on all governments, especially those who are members of the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to ban greenwashing activities. It is also calling on environmental and sustainability accreditation organizations not to endorse industry greenwashing or provide awards to the tobacco industry.

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