

NEWS RELEASE

Kings County Department of Public Health

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TOBACCO LITTER A PROBLEM IN KINGS COUNTY PARKS ***Kings County Youth Assist with Tobacco Litter Clean-Ups***

[Kings County -Hanford] The Kings County Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Services/Tobacco Control Program, in collaboration with several youth groups, conducted tobacco litter clean-ups during the spring and fall of 2011. Youth and adult volunteers, accompanied by health educator Carmen Gutierrez, picked up 2,425 cigarette butts and 6 bags of other tobacco-related litter in 7 Kings County parks.

Cigarette butts are toxic waste. They release the same toxic chemicals found in cigarettes, such as arsenic and nicotine, into the environment. They are poisonous when ingested by children or animals. Cigarette filters are made from cellulose acetate, a plastic which is technically biodegradable. In practice, cellulose acetate is resistant to biodegradation and can persist in the environment, even under ideal conditions of biodegradability. Cigarette butts make up 34% of the total litter collected in California. Public agencies in the state spend in excess of \$41 million annually on litter clean up.

The Kings County Tobacco Control Program tobacco litter clean-ups focused primarily on the most frequently visited parks with tot-lots/playgrounds. In 2003, California passed the smoke-free playground law. This law prohibits smoking within 25 feet of any tot-lot/playground area, in an effort to protect children from secondhand smoke. The law also prohibits disposal of tobacco-related waste, such as cigar and cigarette butts within the playground. The penalty for violation of the law is \$250. Local law enforcement agencies have the general authority to enforce the law under California Penal Code section 830.1.

The results of the litter clean-ups are being presented to city councils in Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore, and to the Kings County Board of Supervisors. Signage is being developed and will be provided to the targeted parks to be posted, in an effort to bring compliance with the law. Youth and Tobacco Control Program staff will conduct follow-up clean-ups in late April and May.

For additional information, or to participate in the clean-ups, please contact Oralia Vallejo at (559) 852-2602 or Carmen Gutierrez at (559) 852-4504.

The Kings County Tobacco Control Program is a program of the Kings County Department of Public Health that is funded by a grant from the California Department of Health Services under grant CTCP -10-16.