**Cigarette butts littering UK beaches doubled in 2012, figures show**

Marine Conservation Society's annual count of rubbish also records a 90% increase in cigarette lighters and packets

The number of cigarette butts littering UK beaches doubled last year, while other rubbish from [smoking](http://www.theguardian.com/society/smoking) including lighters and packets increased by 90%, according to a survey that raises that concerns anti-littering campaigns are failing to make an impact.

Plastic rubbish including sweet and lolly wrappers also rose by 3% in 2012 compared with 2011, the annual count of litter on UK beaches in the [Marine Conservation Society's (MCS) beachwatch big weekend showed](http://www.mcsuk.org/press/view/468).

Almost two-thirds (65%) of the total litter recorded was made of plastic, with unidentified scraps of plastic topping the table for the most commonly found litter. On average, 75 drink bottles were found for every thousand yards of beaches surveyed.

The MCS said it was concerned that so much rubbish was plastic and would be unlikely to break down.

The conservation charity also warned the findings showed decades of anti-litter campaigning needed to be reinvigorated for a new generation.

The rise in smoking-related litter could be the result of more people smoking outside as a result of the smoking ban and dropping their butts rather than putting them in ashtrays, the MCS added.

Overall, litter levels were at their highest level since [2008](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/apr/08/beach-litter-record-levels-mcs), the figures reveal.

Lauren Eyles, MCS Beachwatch officer, said: "Despite last summer being seen as a washout by many with heavy rain in many places, it appears those people that did visit our beaches left behind a lot of personal litter – sweet wrappers, ice cream wrappers and plastic drinks bottles failed to find their way into rubbish bins and ended up being dropped and left behind.

"This year's figures point to people becoming less bothered about littering."

She said: "We must hammer home the message that litter is completely unacceptable in the 21st century."

The number of items of rubbish found per kilometre (0.6 miles) increased from 1,741 pieces of litter in 2011 to just over 2,000 pieces in 2012, the annual report shows.

Volunteers surveyed 90km (56 miles) on 240 beaches and collected almost 1,800 bags of rubbish during the September 2012 weekend.

With four-fifths of the rubbish coming from land-based sources, the MCS said that is where the focus needed to be to reduce marine and beach litter.

After pieces of plastic, the most commonly found items were crisp, lolly and sweet wrappers, little bits of string and cord, caps and lids, polystyrene pieces and drinks bottles.

The other items making up the top 10 litter list were fishing netting, cigarette stubs, glass pieces and fishing line from anglers.

The part of the UK with the most litter per kilometre was Northern Ireland. In England, the most littered beaches were found in the south west. The north west was the only area where litter decreased, falling by 60% per kilometre.