

Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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17 Smith Square
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Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
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24 November 2022

Dear Secretaries of State,

As leaders in the fields of environmental and health protection, we welcome the UK government's commitments to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution and to address the harms of smoking by achieving a smoke-free generation by 2030. We would, therefore, like to draw your attention to a rapidly escalating threat to both of those commitments: single use e-cigarettes, also known as vapes.

Disposable e-cigarettes are dramatically increasing in popularity and are consequently creating a huge waste issue. According to [research by Material Focus](#), at least 1.3 million disposable vapes are thrown away every week, equating to two vapes every second. These are unnecessary electrical items that contain precious metals such as lithium. Lithium is a critical material for our green transition and is simply going to waste in these devices. They are also another unnecessary single use of plastic, a material which, along with the batteries and nicotine these disposables contain, is hazardous to the environment and wildlife when littered.

Moreover, disposable vapes have become hugely popular among young people. Since 2021, there has been a more than [seven-fold increase](#) in the proportion of 11 to 17 year olds who vape using disposable e-cigarettes rather than reusables, and studies indicate that this group is [particularly susceptible](#) to the way in which they are marketed. Uptake among young people is particularly concerning, with multiple health professionals warning that, instead of helping existing smokers to give up the habit, they could create a [whole new generation](#) hooked on nicotine. The harms of vaping are, as yet, not fully established but there is concern regarding increased risk of [chronic lung conditions](#).

As such, we strongly urge the government to ban disposable e-cigarettes and believe the easiest way to do so is by adding them to the list of plastics that are prohibited as part of a shift away from single use culture. Defra's call for evidence on commonly littered and problematic plastic earlier in the year included traditional tobacco filters, but the growing threat of disposable vapes was overlooked.

Decisive action from the UK government now could prevent this emerging environmental problem from becoming a major issue, and head off a health crisis among young people. This decision would not hinder people who choose to use vapes to quit smoking, as reusable vapes are readily available.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila Duffy, chief executive, ASH Scotland
Lorraine Kingsley, CEO, Bin Twinning

Dr Rachel Stancliffe, founder and director, Centre for Sustainable Healthcare
Mary Rice, executive director, Environmental Investigation Agency
Shaun Spiers, executive director, Green Alliance
Dr Honey Smith, director and co-chair of the National Leads Group, Greener Practice UK
Professor Andrew Bush, professor of paediatrics and paediatric respirology at Imperial College London
Catherine Gee, deputy chief executive, Keep Scotland Beautiful
Laura Young, campaigner, Less Waste Laura
Chris Tuckett, director of programmes, Marine Conservation Society
Dr Mike McKean, vice president for health policy, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Adam Grogan, head of wildlife, RSPCA
Kelly Evans, chief executive, Social Change UK
Amy Slack, head of campaigns and policy, Surfers Against Sewage
Kevin Towers, CEO, Techbuyer
Fiona Dear, co-director, The Restart Project
Chris Butler-Stroud, chief executive, Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Dr Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link

