

The importance of clean air and quitting tobacco

By Jenna Solomon

Every year on April 22, we celebrate Earth Day to show our support for environmental stewardship and taking care of the health of our planet. Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday of April each year, reminding us of the importance of planting trees and keeping our air clean. These festivities remind of the importance of clean air and preserving our wildlands for many to enjoy for generations to come.

Tobacco products like cigarettes, vapes and oral tobacco decrease air quality and harm the environment in many ways. Each year, corporate tobacco industries cut down 13.1 million acres of trees, use more than 22 tons of water and produce more than 84 million megatons of carbon dioxide, accounting for nearly .2% of total global emissions and leading to rising temperatures. Tobacco waste, including filters and packaging, adds plastic and hazardous waste to the landfill. Harmful chemicals and metals pollute the ground, waterways and wildlife.

Tobacco use also harms people. In Montana, nearly 1,600 people die prematurely from tobacco-related illnesses and over 7,000 Americans die every year from lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke. Tobacco use is associated with a variety of negative health consequences like heart disease, various cancers and addiction, but it also has a significant impact on the environment and those nearby someone who is using.

There is no safe amount of tobacco smoke exposure. Children, older adults and people with asthma are especially vulnerable to the dangers of tobacco smoke,

That's why Montana passed the Clean Indoor Air Act (CIAA) in 2005. This law protects the public's right to breathe clean air in public places, workplaces and work vehicles. Thanks to the CIAA, many Montanans enjoy clean air in all public spaces.

The best way to keep yourself and others safe from the harms of tobacco and to keep our planet healthy, is to live tobacco-free. Celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day this year by hosting a neighborhood or campus clean up, learning about the harms of tobacco on the environment, or celebrating clean air by planting a tree.

ReACT clubs, which are healthy lifestyle clubs in all Billings middle schools, St. Francis Intermediate School and Shepherd are taking action. You can too. Contact one a RiverStone Health tobacco education specialist to learn more about the harmful effects of tobacco. These small steps can make all the difference on our environment.

If you're ready to quit, help yourself and the planet by going tobacco-free. Quit Now Montana is available for adults 18 years and older. It offers coaching sessions and quit aids like lozenges, patches or medications. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit [QuitNowMontana.com](https://www.QuitNowMontana.com) to learn more. Additional support is available for American Indians and pregnant or nursing women.

For teens under 18, My Life, My Quit offers help to quit all forms of tobacco products, including vapes. Teens can text “Start My Quit” to 36072 or chat online with a trained cessation coach at mylifemyquit.com. These services are free and confidential.

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