

Call for UK ban on single-use vapes as more than 5m discarded each week

Exclusive: Fourfold increase on 2022 sees enough vapes discarded to create 5,000 electric car batteries

Sarah Marsh Consumer affairs correspondent

Fri 8 Sep 2023 05:00 BST

📷 The number of young women vaping in the UK has more than tripled in the past year, government figures show. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

Five million single-use vapes are being thrown away in the UK every week, a fourfold increase on 2022, research has found.

This amounts to eight vapes a second being discarded, with the lithium in the products enough to create 5,000 electric car batteries a year.

The not-for-profit organisation Material Focus, which conducted the research, said the problem was out of control.

The findings come after a series of calls for a ban, with councils and leading paediatricians among those demanding action on vapes because of health and environmental concerns.

Scott Butler, the executive director at Material Focus, said the “problem with single-use vapes has gotten further out of control” since the organisation published research last year. “Single-use vapes are a strong contender for being the most environmentally wasteful, damaging and dangerous consumer product ever made,” he said.

Discarded vapes create environmental waste and pose a threat to public safety, because their lithium batteries can **become flammable when crushed**.

The potential cost of collecting **and recycling vapes**, according to Material Focus, is £200m, which the charity says should be paid for by vape producers, importers and retailers.

Sales of disposable vapes have soared to more than 360m annually in recent years, with the number of **young women vaping every day in the UK more than tripling** in the past year, government figures show. Paediatricians have said vaping is “fast becoming an epidemic among children”, and called on the government to ban disposable vapes.

A YouGov survey found that 33% of 16-18 years olds who vaped threw their e-cigarettes in the bin.

Butler said: “Very few producers and retailers comply with environmental regulations and put recycling points and systems in place. This all means that too often local authorities are being burdened with the major operational and financial headaches associated with what is now the fastest growing and most dangerous waste stream in the UK, single-use vapes.”

Other countries have recently taken measures to limit their sale. In France, the prime minister, Élisabeth Borne, said on Sunday that the government would present **a national plan to ban** disposable e-cigarettes. Germany **has banned** flavoured e-cigarettes, while in Ireland **a consultation is under way** on banning single-use vapes. Humza Yousaf, the Scottish first minister, **on**

Most viewed

Boy, 16, arrested aft
of famous Sycamor
tree at Hadrian's W

Sunak expected to
powers of councils
England to curb ca

Michael Gambon, s
Harry Potter and T
Singing Detective, c
82

Dan Wootton sacke
MailOnline a day af
News suspension

Birmingham coun
to demolish brutal
landmark

Tuesday announced that Scotland would hold a consultation on banning disposable vapes in 2024.

Material Focus surveyed 5,156 UK adults and 167 16- and 17-year-olds between June and August. They wanted to identify how many single-use vapes were being bought in the UK and how they were disposed of.

The research also explored the preferred recycling solutions for vapes. About 75% of vapers think producers and retailers should provide more information to say vapes can be recycled.

The number of battery-related waste fires continues to rise, some thought to have been caused by e-cigarettes in waste.

Butler said “visible vape recycling drop-off points” should be introduced, alongside “proper financing of genuine recycling solutions”. He said there needed to be “immediate, significant and transparent vape industry voluntary action” and called for the word “disposable” to be dropped from marketing of the products.

“Until single-use vape producers, importers and retailers act to genuinely comply with and finance their legal environmental responsibilities then the calls for banning the sale of them will only strengthen,” he added.

Only 17% of people say they recycle single-use vapes, with 73% thrown away and 1% flushed down the toilet.

Material Focus wants more information displayed on vapes on how they can be recycled, and additional recycling points for the products in stores, parks, public places and schools and colleges. More than half of survey respondents said they would be more likely to recycle single-use vapes if there were recycling points in store.

Material Focus has produced a briefing note for retailers and producers on how they can comply with environmental regulations for vapes. It has also created a postcode locator of 13,000 locations where vapes can be recycled.

A spokesperson for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said: “The government is very concerned about the environmental impacts of disposable vapes and will shortly publish a response to its call for evidence on vaping, which closed in June. All electrical waste should be properly disposed of and recycled to protect our environment – this includes disposable vape pens.

“Our environmental improvement plan sets out our plan to review rules for waste electricals this year. As part of this, we will consider what changes in legislation are needed to ensure the vaping sector foots the bill for the collection and treatment of their used products.”

The Guardian has spent the past 13 years tirelessly investigating the shortcomings of the Tories in office – austerity, Brexit, partygate, cronyism, the Truss debacle and the individual failings of ministers who behave as if the rules don’t apply to them.

Our work has resulted in resignations, apologies and policy corrections. Our continued revelations about the conveyor belt of Tory dysfunction are the latest in a long line of important scoops. And with an election just round the corner, we won’t stop now. It’s crucial that we can all make informed decisions about who is best to lead the UK. Will you invest in the Guardian this year?

Unlike many others, the Guardian has no shareholders and no billionaire owner. Just the determination and passion to deliver high-impact global reporting, always free from commercial or political influence. Reporting like this is vital for democracy, for fairness and to demand better from the powerful.

And we provide all this for free, for everyone to read. We do this because we believe in information equality. Greater numbers of people can keep track of the events shaping our world, understand their impact on people