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Community Unites for Beach Cleanup — 308 Pounds of Trash Removed from Virginia Key

Event focused on volunteering to address environmental health threats posed by toxic cigarette butts and disposable vaping devices



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Key Biscayne, FL — On September 20, 2025, the Consortium for a Healthier Miami-Dade joined community volunteers during the Virginia Key Dog Beach Cleanup Event in Key Biscayne. A total of 122 volunteers participated, including Hope for Miami, students from Coral Reef High School and Christopher Columbus High School, and additional community partners and residents.

Volunteers removed a wide range of litter from the shoreline including cigarette butts, disposable electronic vapor products (EVPs), metal bottle caps, plastic bottle tops, glass and plastic bottles, pineapples, coconuts, rusted rods, wood planks, and various types of plastic waste for a combined total of 308.31 pounds of trash collected.

Youth and adults emphasized the importance of environmental stewardship to protect South Florida's coastlines and marine ecosystems. Participants highlighted the dangers of tobacco waste and plastic pollution to waterways and wildlife, underscoring the link between environmental health and public health.

Photos and videos documented the volume of debris removed and the community's collective effort, helping raise awareness of coastal conservation and the urgent need to prevent litter at its source. The cleanup was widely regarded as a success, restoring a local beach while providing an educational experience that reinforced responsible disposal practices and the importance of protecting Florida's marine environments.

"Miami-Dade parks and beaches are treasures that deserve our protection for current and future generations," said Amanda from Hope for Miami. "This cleanup provided an opportunity for community members to come together and take action to preserve and beautify these spaces while promoting healthier environments for all Floridians."

Cigarette butts remain the most commonly littered item worldwide.[1] When discarded, they break down into thousands of microplastic fibers, release toxic chemicals into soil and water, and can be deadly to wildlife if ingested.[2] The presence of cigarette litter can also trigger setbacks for individuals attempting to quit smoking.[3] Removing these products from public spaces protects the environment and supports tobacco cessation efforts.

Since July 2022, more than 75 municipalities across 41 counties in Florida have passed ordinances restricting smoking and/or tobacco use in parks and beaches, reflecting growing momentum toward tobacco-free public spaces.

For more information on volunteer opportunities or tobacco free environmental initiatives, please contact the Consortium for a Healthier Miami-Dade.

¹ Castaldi, G., Cecere, G. & Zoli, M. "Smoke on the beach": on the use of economic vs behavioral policies to reduce environmental pollution by cigarette littering. *Econ Polit* **38**, 1025–1048 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-020-00205-5>

² NOAA Marine Debris Program. (n.d.) No butts about it: Cigarettes are the most common debris. NOAA Marine Debris Blog. Retrieved August 12, 2024, from <https://blog.marinedebris.noaa.gov/no-butts-about-it-cigarettes-are-most-common-debris>

³ National Cancer Institute. (n.d.). Handling nicotine withdrawal and triggers when you decide to quit tobacco. National Institutes of Health. <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/tobacco/withdrawal-fact-sheet>