

THE ESSENTIALS ON...

DRUGS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

While the impact of drugs on the environment remains relatively unknown, existing studies indicate disastrous and often irreversible effects.

In recent years, France has taken steps to address this issue, which is included in the Interministerial Strategy for Mobilisation Against Addictive Behaviours 2023-2027. Notably, the environmental concerns related to the production, transportation, and distribution of both legal and illegal drugs deserve to be emphasised in prevention messages.

In 2021, the Interministerial Mission for Combating Drugs and Addictive Behaviours (MILDECA) launched a research initiative with the UNODC to investigate these issues. Thanks to funding from France, the UNODC published a booklet in 2022 detailing the global environmental impact of drugs. Since then, two further chapters examining the environmental damages caused by drugs in various regions have been released.

A final chapter is expected to be published in June 2025, focusing on the environmental impact of drugs in Europe.

Additionally, France brought this topic to the forefront during its presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022. The issue is also clearly addressed in the European Union's Drugs Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025).

Lastly, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna is increasingly engaging with this important issue.

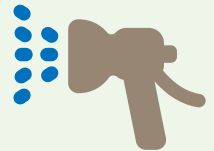
The UNODC report on Amazonia published in 2023 highlights that the illicit drug trade exacerbates and amplifies a range of other criminal activities in the Amazon basin, including illegal land occupation, illegal logging and mining, wildlife trafficking, and other crimes that harm the environment. The chapter included in the World Drug Report 2024 focuses on the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia, where drug traffickers illegally extract natural resources and dump waste from methamphetamine production into local rivers.

KEY FIGURES - NARCOTICS



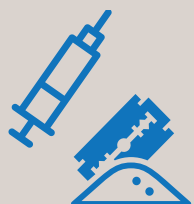
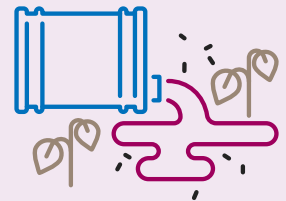
CANNABIS

- ▶ **1 kg of dried cannabis flowers** produced indoors generates between **2,300 and 5,200 kg of CO₂**.
- ▶ In the Netherlands, indoor cultivation requires about 1 billion kWh of electricity annually, equivalent to the energy consumption of households in the city of Rotterdam (population: 650,000).
- ▶ The illegal and intensive monoculture of high-yield cannabis strains increases pressure on already fragile ecosystems, **requires significant use of pesticides and fertilisers**, and contributes to water shortages and biodiversity loss.
- ▶ Groundwater is used to irrigate cannabis crops in dry, sunny regions such as California. **An outdoor cannabis plant can require up to 22.7 litres of water per day.**



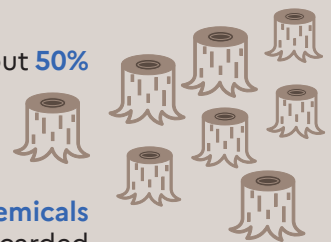
SYNTHETIC DRUGS – AMPHETAMINES, MDMA, METHAMPHETAMINES

- ▶ These substances are produced in illegal laboratories, resulting in the **dumping of toxic waste** into forests and rivers, or directly into sewage systems.
- ▶ The production of a single kilogram of these three synthetic drugs generates between **5 and 30 kg of toxic waste**, leading to an estimated **2,454 to 4,310 tonnes of waste** worldwide between 2016 and 2020.
- ▶ In Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle region, methamphetamine production is thought to generate between **1,900 and 3,800 tonnes of toxic waste each year**.
- ▶ Residues from consumed drugs are eliminated by the human body and discharged into sewer systems or waterways. Following a music festival, pollution levels in nearby rivers from MDMA residues can be 56 to 104 times higher downstream than upstream of the event, which has detrimental effects on aquatic ecosystems.



COCAINE AND HEROIN

- ▶ Illegal coca cultivation is directly or indirectly responsible for about **50% of deforestation** in two regions of Colombia.
- ▶ Producing just **1 gram of cocaine** results in the destruction of **4 square metres of forest**.
- ▶ The production of heroin and cocaine involves **hazardous chemicals such as sulphuric acid, gasoline, and kerosene**, which are often discarded recklessly into ecosystems.
- ▶ Bales of product tossed overboard by traffickers off the coast contribute to the **destruction of marine wildlife and habitats**.



Sources :

[Booklet 5 « Drogues et environnement » dans la Rapport mondial sur les drogues 2022 de l'ONUDC.](#)

[Booklet 4 du Rapport mondial sur la drogue de l'ONUDC 2023 sur les liens entre la drogue et les crimes qui affectent l'environnement dans le bassin amazonien](#)

[Rapport mondial sur la drogue de l'ONUDC 2024](#)

[L'impact désastreux de l'industrie du tabac sur l'environnement \(OMS\) | ONU Info](#)

[L'OMS tire la sonnette d'alarme concernant l'impact de l'industrie du tabac sur l'environnement](#)

[La dixième session de la Conférence des Parties a adopté des décisions historiques pour protéger l'environnement contre les effets néfastes du tabac et pour traiter la publicité, la promotion et le parrainage transfrontières](#)

[« L'industrie du tabac tue aussi l'environnement » Dossier de presse, 22 juin 2023, Alliance Contre le Tabac.](#)

[Fiche pollution mégots \(ecologie.gouv.fr\)](#)

[Valoriser le protoxyde d'azote par un procédé photocatalytique éco-responsable](#)
[Un éco-organisme pour lutter contre la pollution due aux mégots | vie-publique.fr](#)
[Les mégots, ennemis majeurs mais méconnus de l'environnement \(cnct.fr\)](#)
https://www.euda.europa.eu/sites/default/files/pdf/31260_en.pdf?403498
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/tobacco-harming-the-planet-not-just-health-study-says/#:~:text=This%20included%20the%20depletion%20of%201.4%20million%20litres%20of%20water>

MILDECA sources :

[Action internationale | MILDECA \(drogues.gouv.fr\)](#)

[Journée mondiale de la terre : comment les drogues détruisent la planète | MILDECA \(2023\)](#)

[Drogues, quels impacts pour la planète ? | MILDECA \(2024\)](#)

[Journée mondiale de l'eau : découvrez l'impact des drogues sur l'environnement | MILDECA \(2023\)](#)

[Retour sur la 67ème session de la Commission des stupéfiants qui s'est tenue à Vienne du 14 au 22 mars 2024 | MILDECA \(drogues.gouv.fr\)](#)

KEY FIGURES – TOBACCO

The environmental impact of tobacco production and consumption :



- Every year, **22 billion tonnes of water** are used globally for tobacco production.
- Smoking a pack of 20 cigarettes a day for 50 years consumes approximately **1.4 million litres of water**.



- Tobacco contains **7,000 toxic chemicals**, including arsenic, mercury, and lead, which are released into the environment.
- Disposable e-cigarettes, particularly non-rechargeable models that are not recyclable and contain batteries, are highly polluting.

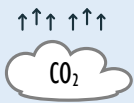


- Each year, **600 million trees** are cut down for global tobacco production.
- Every year, **200,000 hectares of land are cleared** to grow tobacco, the equivalent of around 280,000 football pitches.



Focus on littered cigarette butts in nature

- A staggering 4.5 trillion filters are discarded into the environment each year.
- In France alone, between 20,000 and 25,000 tonnes of cigarette butts are littered annually.
- Just one cigarette butt can contaminate up to 500 litres of water.
- It takes over 12 years for a cigarette filter to biodegrade.
- Cigarette filters contain microplastics and rank as the second most common type of plastic pollution worldwide.



- The tobacco industry emits **84 million tonnes of CO2 globally each year**, which is comparable to 520,000 round-trip flights between Paris and New York.



NITROUS OXIDE

- ▶ This potent greenhouse gas contributes to climate change, remaining in the atmosphere for up to 120 years.
- ▶ The cartridges found in abundance in urban and natural settings pose particularly challenging waste management issues at incineration facilities. When subjected to high temperatures in the furnaces, the gas residues can lead to explosions of the canisters, which in turn cause the furnace doors to blow open. Communities are facing an increasing number of incidents that shut down the furnaces and result in costly repairs.



And around the world...

Promoting and supporting alternative development programmes in producing countries also enhances the sustainable management of natural resources. That is why MILDECA, in partnership with the UNODC and the French fair-trade coffee producer Malongo, supports alternative development projects in Bolivia and Peru aimed at:

- ▶ reducing the land used for coca leaf cultivation in favour of sustainable, high-quality coffee farming;
- ▶ ensuring producers receive a stable income and access to European markets, which supports a long-term, balanced, and sustainable approach.

These initiatives also help reforest affected areas and prevent the release of toxic chemicals from cocaine production into the environment, creating a positive cycle for the planet.

In 2024, France intensified its commitment by supporting a UNODC alternative development project in the Pasco region of Peru. This project is particularly focused on empowering female coffee producers and includes a dedicated component for environmental protection.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

« I don't throw my cigarette butts on the ground, so I'm not polluting »

Beyond the 75,000 deaths each year linked to tobacco consumption, the production and use of tobacco products pose significant dangers to ecosystems. In addition to cigarette butts, the waste generated by smoking releases CO2 emissions equivalent to 520,000 round-trip flights between Paris and New York. Furthermore, annual tobacco production destroys 200,000 hectares of land, which is comparable to 280,000 football pitches.

Many people may not realise that cigarette filters are not biodegradable and contain microplastics, making them the second most prevalent form of plastic pollution in the world.

« A pill of MDMA is far too small to have any impact on the environment...»

While these pills may be small, their impact on the planet is significant: producing 1 kg of MDMA generates 6 to 10 kg of toxic waste. For other synthetic drugs like methamphetamine, the production of 1 kg results in 5 to 10 kg of toxic waste. Worse still, making 1 kg of amphetamine produces a staggering 20 to 30 kg of toxic waste! On a global scale, this amounts to thousands of tonnes!

« Cannabis is an eco-friendly, organic drug »

In reality, cannabis contributes to resource depletion and pollution, whether it is grown indoors or outdoors. For example, in the Netherlands, indoor cultivation consumes an astounding 1 billion kWh of electricity each year - equivalent to the total energy used by households in Rotterdam, a city of 650,000 inhabitants.

FALSE

ABOUT MILDECA

Under the authority of the Prime Minister, MILDECA (Interministerial Mission for Combating Drugs and Addictive Behaviours) spearheads and coordinates the government's efforts to combat drugs and addiction. In this capacity, it formulates the government's strategy in key areas such as research and monitoring, prevention, health and integration, law enforcement, trafficking prevention, and international cooperation.

MILDECA supports public, institutional, and associative partners in the implementation of public policy directions, providing them with methodological and financial assistance.

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MILDECA is committed

