

# Recycling Cigarettes at SOU



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## **Introduction:**

Southern Oregon University has an action plan that they are attempting to accomplish, one of the goals of this action plan is to finalize a strategy for a zero waste campus. The focus of this capstone project is to contribute to this plan by addressing cigarette waste. Introducing this momentous program to recycle cigarette waste, called the Cigarette Waste Brigade. By utilizing a company called Terracycle, Southern Oregon University could get closer to their zero waste goals. Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter in the U.S, Terracycle, a recycling and up-cycling company started by Tom Szaky, company recently began what he calls a Cigarette Waste Brigade in which Szaky and his company incentivizes people or organizations to send in their boxes of cigarette waste so they can recycle the products and turn them into something else. Southern Oregon University's liberal agendas, as well as the student's passions to make change for the better is the reason we chose this school as a perfect candidate to participate in the brigade. Not to mention less cigarette litter on the ground will make the SOU campus more aesthetically pleasing for current and future students and staff, and at the same time be helpful for the custodial teams who pick up the waste. We think that when students have the option to recycle cigarettes, they might think twice about throwing them on the ground. One of the reasons we believe people aren't making it into the trash is because by doing so there cigarette will just end up in a landfill which isn't a very constructive place for it to go. When people have the option to recycle this item they thought would be unrecyclable they tend to do so, now they have the option to feel environmentally sound, which we think a lot of our students will appreciate.

## **Methodology:**

Terracycle is a unique company that started back in 2001 with the idea that any piece of trash could be recycled or upcycled. Terracycle has a whole list of things that they will take and upcycle. As part of the cigarette waste brigade, Terracycle takes the cigarette butts, inner foil, outer wrapping, unused tobacco, ashes and other elements that comprise of cigarette waste. Once collected, the items are separated and based on the composition those items either become melted and turned into designated hard plastics, such as ash trays and plastic pallets, or composted. When we were on their website we came across their receptacles they have for purchase and thought that they would be a beneficial investment for our project because they are designed to effectively collect the waste and prevent other waste from getting in.

Starting this project, we needed to begin by applying to the Green Fund for winter term in order to try to get funds by the beginning of spring term. While in the application process we realized potential collaborators that would be involved in the project. We met with SOU's Sustainability and Recycling Coordinator, Roxane-Beigel-Coryell, and discussed with her how this project would work and how it would continue to work once this year is over. She gave us the names of people we needed to get ahold of and also agreed to be the facilitator who would be willing to print out the shipping labels and send out the cigarette waste to Terracycle. We chose the university housing and the Stevenson Union as our preliminary locations. Once we had our locations set, we then contacted the key stakeholders for those places. Noah Hurley, the Interim

Director of Student Housing, heard our pitch and gave us his staffs support to let us implement new receptacles around housing. His staff will be able to pick up that waste and bring it to Roxane at the facilities administration buildings. We then met with Danielle Mancuso, Assistant Director of Student Life for the Union and Traditions, who set up a meeting with us and her custodial staff to work out a plan for the Stevenson Union. In this meeting it became obvious that the receptacles we initially picked out from Terracycle weren't going to be the best option for the SU. The receptacles are designed to go around polls and the areas around the SU with polls weren't near the places students smoke. As a group we decided the best decision would be to purchase more of the receptacles they currently have and place more of them around the SU specifically for litter prevention.

During the Green Fund application process we calculated the total cost of our project with the thought in mind that 4 receptacles would go to the SU and 4 would be placed at the residence halls both with posters we would get from print and copy to advertise the new program, all together costing approximately \$900. We presented our pitch to them and ended up getting the funds we applied for.

Another portion of our project was creating and conducting an electronic survey that we posted through social media specifically targeting SOU students . Questions that we asked included; are you a current tobacco smoker, whether or not they thought cigarette litter is a problem on SOU's campus, on a narrative scale ask how likely they are to discard their cigarette products in the trash, would they be more persistent about getting their cigarette waste in a trash bin if they knew that the cigarettes were being recycled. The goal of the survey was to gage the

general public's opinion of cigarette waste on our campus. The idea is that we could use this feedback for potential future growth of this project.

### **Results and Discussion:**

The deliverables we have for this project are four Terracycle receptacles that will be placed around the Residence Halls, as well as approximately six new cigarette receptacles that will be placed around the Stevenson Union. The Stevenson Union receptacles will get decals around them indicating that students can recycle their cigarette waste there. Once this program is implemented, custodial staff from the Residence Halls will collect the cigarette waste when these receptacles are full, they will place it in a bag that will be brought to Roxane at the facilities management and planning building where she will print out a free shipping label to place on the box and ship it out to Terracycle. The custodial staff from the Stevenson Union will also collect the waste when the receptacles are full and then ship it off to Terracycle from the SU.

The final steps of our project include installing the receptacles by the end of the term or into the summer depending on when the shipment arrives. The official cigarette recycling program will begin the Fall Term of 2017. Once the receptacles and posters are in place and properly illustrating what waste is accepted, our hope is that there will be a behavioral and change in the smokers on our campus in terms of them relocating their waste to the new favorable location. The ultimate goal is to divert cigarette waste from the ground as well landfills by providing smokers with a more constructive place of waste.

## **Conclusion:**

Along with other aspirations, Southern Oregon University is striving towards being a zero waste campus and an overall more ecofriendly campus. Southern Oregon University is a campus with a lot of movers and shakers hoping to make change for the better, that's why Southern Oregon University is a great place for the Cigarette Waste Brigade. Terracycle makes it easy to get on the recycling and upcycling path SOU has envisioned. This is a win- win situation which there is no undesirable outcomes.

However often students vote to keep this campus a smoke friendly campus, students are in favor of maintaining smoking zones. It's important to note that this project's goal is not to encourage smoking. That being said, it appears that smoking is a part of SOU's culture for the time being, so we wanted to make sure we are doing all we can to be as environmentally responsible as possible.

We are hoping that this new program will contribute to a shift in the amount of cigarette litter on the campus. With more receptacles and a constructive place for the waste to go we are hoping that students will take the time to get their waste in the proper location. We are also counting on this project being expanded through the whole campus once other staff sees how easy it can be.

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