

No butts about it

A Sustainability Victoria campaign helps stamp out cigarette butt litter following a smoking ban

When the Victoria, Australia, government banned smoking inside establishments that serve alcohol, including hotels, pubs and nightclubs, effective 1 July 2007, Sustainability Victoria predicted that cigarette butt litter would increase. To make sure that didn't happen, a coordinated campaign promoted a collective responsibility for butt litter, targeted smokers with a "bin your butts" message and raised awareness of butt litter in the community. With creative communications, incentives for pubs and clubs, and grass-roots efforts, littering behavior decreased by almost half.

Cigarette litter already constituted 56 percent of Victoria's litter stream, according to the *Victorian Litter Report 2005*. One in 10 cigarette butts ended up in Port Phillip Bay or in waterways, poisoning plant and animal life and damaging the environment. Focus group research showed that the community saw cigarette butts as relatively harmless because of their small size, and thought they were biodegradable. A key finding was that smokers' littering actions were influenced by the availability of adequate disposal bins at venues. Research also showed that the majority of local government and supported agencies were actively preparing for the new laws, but less than



Offbeat advertising such as this example on a city crosswalk helped Sustainability Victoria promote the "Bin Your Butts" message and reach its target group of mostly urban smokers.

half had raised the issue with venues such as pubs. An analysis of Liquor Licensing Victoria data showed that about 8,000 licensed establishments were most at risk for increased littering because they were located in inner urban areas with no designated smoking area such as a courtyard or beer garden; without designated outdoor areas where patrons could go for a smoke, Sustainability Victoria surmised that smokers would be

more likely to wander into other public spaces and toss their cigarette butts.

The primary target audience of the campaign was smokers. Because nightclubs and bars are frequented by young people, it was important for any on-site communications to contain messages that this demographic could relate to. Many smokers also already felt socially persecuted; therefore, the campaign needed to encourage smokers to

do the right thing, rather than vilify them.

Goals and objectives

The long-term goal of Sustainability Victoria's campaign was to help meet the state's Towards Zero Waste litter target of a 25 percent reduction in littering behavior by 2014.

The short-term goal was to prevent an increase in butt littering associated with the new legislation by building a shared

responsibility between smokers, industry and governments to take effective action.

The two primary objectives against which behavioral outcomes were evaluated were:

1. **To have at least 20 percent** of affected premises (that is, establishments that serve alcohol) surveyed be model adopters by the peak of the campaign at the end of August, demonstrating very strong levels of support through implementation of the campaign's recommended actions.

2. **To prevent an increase** in cigarette butt littering by smokers at model adopter locations by the peak of the campaign, bringing the littering rate below the norm of 50 percent.

Solution and implementation

Sustainability Victoria worked with two consultants, The Reputation Group and Grey Group, to develop a collaborative campaign focusing on changing smokers' behaviors at venues identified most at risk of increased littering. Activities were designed to make it easier for local governments, pubs and clubs to take an active role and share the responsibility.

The campaign included:

- **The participation** of key partners in a consultative campaign committee, including the Australian Hotels Association, City of Melbourne, Department

of Human Services, EPA Victoria and Victorian Litter Action Alliance. Stakeholders provided industry knowledge, assessed proposed campaign materials and shared information with their members.

- **Information and resources** provided to industry and butt-litter prevention workshops and toolkits for local governments to build their capacity to handle the problem. Through a Department of Human Services workshop, 100 environmental health officers representing 75 councils were trained on the campaign.

- **Free support tools** for licensed venues, such as toolkits with fact sheets and free campaign-branded materials, such as posters, stickers and personal ashtrays.

- **Incentives**, including a Butt Bin Rebate Scheme, a rebate for licensed venues to purchase a fixed or mobile butt bin.

- **Public education** about butt litter using advertising and public relations through local governments. Advertising consisted of posters in washrooms and on bus shelters near venues, and a humorous radio advertisement. A comprehensive media and promotions program was conducted.

- **A team** of on-the-ground "Butts Champs," young adults dressed in contemporary clothing who visited venues to give away personal ashtrays to smokers and reward them for doing

the right thing with free public transportation passes.

The major campaign challenge was changing smokers' behaviors on a limited budget. Partnerships were integral to the campaign's design and delivery.

Measurement and evaluation

Community Change, a research group that specializes in measuring behavioral change, conducted an independent evaluation to measure awareness of the key campaign messages both before and after 1 July 2007, together with site measures of litter and littering behavior outside 60 landlocked, "at risk" venues. In addition, surveys and a focus group evaluated stakeholder response, and media coverage analysis was conducted.

The campaign achieved its goals of changing smoker behaviors to reduce butt litter. The pre-legislation littering measure of 58 percent would have been expected to rise to between 70 and 90 percent without intervention. At the peak of the campaign, littering rates had been almost halved—from 58 percent to 33 percent—based on litter samples taken at various locations.

Prior to 1 July 2007, 40 percent of smokers were binning their butts. By the campaign peak, this had increased to 66 percent, or two-thirds of smok-

ers. Although there were more people in public spaces after the smoking ban, there was a decrease in butt-littering behavior, indicating an increased sense of responsibility by smokers.

Littering decreased where venues implemented the campaign's litter-prevention strategies. The goal of achieving 20 percent of venues being "very supportive" or "extremely supportive" through active implementation of the campaign's recommended actions was exceeded, with 73 percent of venues indicating support at the campaign peak in August 2007.

Media publicity firmly placed the issue on the public's agenda—one-third of smokers surveyed were aware of the campaign through its media coverage. Two hundred and twelve positive electronic and print media items were achieved over four months—the majority of which highlighted key messages. •

about the author

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