

Oct. 25, 2007

Keep Sarasota County Beautiful 'TAGS' cigarette litter at Reading Festival

With the support of the Sarasota County Commission, Waste Management and local law enforcement, Keep Sarasota County Beautiful is launching a new initiative to engage the public more effectively on the proper disposal of cigarette litter. At the Nov. 3 Reading Festival, it will debut a new educational campaign and the Cigarette Prevention Hotline, 365-TAGS, which will give citizens more power to report cigarette litter offenders.

To help launch the campaign, residents are asked to collect discarded cigarette butts and bring them to the KSCB booth for weighing. Prizes will be awarded based on the ounces people collect.

"Cigarette butts are the world's largest environmental litter problem, one that is growing due to the expansion of indoor smoking bans," said KSCB Manager Sandra Washington. "Efforts to reduce this litter have been inconsistent. Meanwhile, tons of this litter clog our stormwater drains and pollute our bays and beaches."

According to Washington, it can take anywhere from one to 12 years for a cigarette to decompose. During the process, it leaches harmful chemicals into the soil and water. Butts thrown from car windows can spark costly and dangerous wildfires, especially during the region's current drought.

Washington says the hotline has been successful in larger cities like San Diego, reducing the amount of cigarette butts thrown from car windows and on the ground outside buildings where smoking is no longer allowed.

"Keep Sarasota County Beautiful relies on the generosity of patrons to sustain its programs," Washington added. "This one holds great urgency if we are to keep our roadways, beaches and waterways free of litter."

For more information about sponsoring this initiative, or participating in November, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Keep Sarasota County Beautiful.