

# Vancouver the first city in North America cigarette butt recycling program

BY JEFF LEE, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 12, 2013

Vancouver on Tuesday became the first municipality in North America to initiate a cigarette butt recycling program, and it will cost taxpayers the grand sum of \$110.

Not \$110 per person, or even per property, but for the entire six-month program.

That's because the city is kicking \$1 for each of the 110 pole-mounted fireproof cigarette butt recycling containers that have now been installed in four downtown Vancouver business districts. The rest of the project, total cost unknown, is being underwritten by TerraCycle, the New York-based company that already has established consumer-based cigarette butt recycling programs.

Two Vancouver social services agencies, United We Can and Embers, are also involved.

Embers provided the manpower necessary to mount the canisters in the Downtown, Robson, Gastown and West End business districts, and United We Can, which works with the poor and unemployed in the inner city, will employ people to empty the canisters on a regular basis and ship the collected butts to TerraCycle's Canadian depot.

The long, slim receptacles are marked with stickers that say "Recycle Your Butts Here."

Albe Zakes, the global vice-president of communications for TerraCycle, said the company has already proven there is a market for the cellulose acetate contained in cigarette butt filters. The company has collected more than 10,000 pounds of the material and turned it into items such as plastic pallets and plastic lumber. Zakes said butts contain highly toxic compounds that can get into groundwater, and are the single biggest source of street litter in the world.

TerraCycle, which specializes in recycling difficult-to-recycle material, uses proprietary technology to clean and convert the toxic wastes into inert material, he said. If the Vancouver experiment is a success, another 2,000 butt receptacles could be deployed.

Vancouver Deputy Mayor Andrea Reimer said the city has been trying to get the butt recycling program off the ground for four years after Mayor Gregor Robertson met with TerraCycle officials in New York. The idea is part of the city's drive to become the greenest city in the world by 2020.

Reimer, who recently gave up smoking, said complaints about cigarette butt litter is among the top complaints she receives.

Although Vancouver is the first city to sign on with the program, New York State has been working on a bill require a butt recycling program. It began considering the idea in 2010 but the issue is now stuck in a state environmental conservation committee.

Zakes said TerraCycle chose Vancouver to launch its municipal program in part because Vancouver was determined to start a program itself.

"We would love to do this in New York and Chicago and London and Tokyo and the world's biggest cities, but we also need buy-in from the city, from the mayors themselves, and we found that excitement, that enthusiasm and commitment here in Vancouver," he said.

[jefflee@vancouversun.com](mailto:jefflee@vancouversun.com)

[Twitter.com/sunciviclee](https://twitter.com/sunciviclee)

Blog: [www.vancouversun.com/jefflee](http://www.vancouversun.com/jefflee)

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