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On Sunday, April 17 and Monday, April 18, there will be a campus-wide cleanup of cigarette butts to celebrate Earth Day and promote the health and wellness of the campus community, the environment and wildlife. The idea for the cleanup came in response to increasing complaints about cigarette butt litter around campus.

Sarah Kenney, Radford University's health educator, said the idea came after the university spent some time addressing the smoking policy and related issues and needs on campus. During those conversations, cigarette butt litter came up as an issue.

"I often hear students, faculty and staff express their frustration about the cigarette butt litter on campus," Kenney said. "Here's a chance to do something about it."

Kenney took it upon herself to see how much of a problem cigarette butt litter had become on campus. One day Kenney went out and began picking up cigarette butts around Tyler Hall. Within an hour and a half, she had picked up 2,236 butts within the 25-foot buffer areas outside the building's exits.

RU's smoking policy prohibits smoking in indoor and enclosed spaces and within 25 feet of building entrances. The policy also states that appropriate signage should be present in designated smoking areas on campus.

The butts Kenney picked up around Tyler were displayed on campus during the Great American Smoke-out in November.

The effort that will take place this month, which will be on a much wider scale than just the area surrounding Tyler Hall, will yield another display, this time for the annual Earth Day celebration on campus, planned for Wednesday, April 20.

There are certain places around campus that Kenney says have been pointed out as areas where cigarette butts are more prevalent and that smoking in general has been expressed

as a problem.

"I have heard complaints of smoke entering student rooms and the lobby at Muse," said Kenney, who also said that litter problem areas people have mentioned include the areas around Russell and Washington halls and "under trees".

According to Kenney, the goal of the clean-up effort and the subsequent display of the cigarette butts is "to raise awareness about cigarette butt toxins and encourage dialogue about this issue."

The facts about cigarette butts are overlooked and often misunderstood by the public.

"Cigarette butts are the most common form of litter on earth, and are not made of cotton as many people believe," Kenney said. "The filters are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic, and present a toxic threat to organisms as they leach into our soil, end up in our water, damage aquatic ecosystems and are also mistaken for food by fish and birds."

Even the leading cigarette manufacturers acknowledge the overwhelming problems with cigarette butt litter. Philip Morris USA stated on their website that "based on the results of Ocean Conservancy's 2009 Annual International Coastal Cleanup, more cigarette butts were collected than any other type of litter and cigarette butts accounted for almost one-third of all items collected." The company is partnering with others to address the problem and "[educate] smokers that cigarettes are litter that should be disposed of properly."

Last year the SGA hosted a forum to discuss the possibility of enforcing a smoking ban on campus. Aside from that forum, there has been little open discussion of a ban. As far as the issues with litter around campus, there are some things the university could do, short of a tobacco ban, to curb the problem.

"To create a more permanent solution to the issue... the campus community and the university may decide to address the RU smoking policy or increase the number of cigarette butt receptacles for people to properly dispose of their cigarette butts, in addition to educating the public about these issues," Kenney said.

Until a solution is found, the easiest way to address the problem is to create awareness, which is what the clean-up event is about. It may also help promote a sense of pride in RU's campus.