

IDA Achievement Awards  
Operation Downtown - Des Moines, IA  
Cigarette Litter Prevention Campaign  
*Walk Your Butt to the Can*

**Project Summary**

Cigarette litter is a continually increasing problem in downtown Des Moines. The Operation Downtown ambassadors spend more time cleaning up cigarette litter than any other form of litter downtown. The Keep America Beautiful Cigarette Litter Prevention Program, branded locally as *Walk Your Butt to the Can*, was implemented at a crucial time for Des Moines, Iowa. The City of Des Moines recently passed non-smoking ordinances in parking garages and some parks; and many downtown corporation campuses and hospitals have gone smoke-free. In addition, the State of Iowa passed a smoking ban that will go into effect July 1, 2008. The increase in non-smoking ordinances, laws, and smoke-free companies has resulted in more cigarette butt accumulation in other outdoor areas.

A collaborative effort was made by Operation Downtown, the City of Des Moines, Keep Iowa Beautiful, and Metro Waste Authority to launch a cigarette litter prevention campaign based on the model prepared by Keep America Beautiful. The campaign, named *Walk Your Butt to the Can*, was focused on educating the public that cigarette butts are litter, encouraging smokers to use ash receptacles to properly dispose of cigarette butts, and working closely with downtown businesses to evaluate and communicate designated smoking areas.

Meetings were held with downtown property managers/owners, public officials, and neighborhood association representatives to provide education about the growing cigarette litter concern and address how they can help. Ash urns were purchased and placed at key transition points. The Mayor of Des Moines did a public proclamation signing at a press conference kick-off event. Newspaper advertisements and skywalk display panels with the campaign message were purchased. The Operation Downtown ambassadors wore brightly colored campaign shirts and handed out mints with the campaign logo. Promotional t-shirts were also given away at Iowa Cubs Triple A baseball games to help create public awareness. Emails and informational packets were sent to corporate communicators requesting they encourage employees to use ash receptacles and clarify designated locations. A web page publicized the campaign, showing the proclamation, litter statistics, an email template for corporate communicators, poster, letter from the Downtown Community Alliance President, and even a place to suggest ash urn locations. The campaign was verbalized at multiple corporate, residential, and association meetings, as well as highlighted in our company newsletter. Posters were distributed and displayed. The project was funded by grants/contributions from Metro Waste Authority, Keep Iowa Beautiful, and Operation Downtown.

Operation Downtown exemplified distinctive problem solving skills by encouraging downtown businesses to take an active role in the initiative. Multiple organizations evaluated smoking areas and patterns not only on their property but surrounding areas utilized by their employees.

Overall, cigarette litter in study areas was reduced 51 percent. An independent marketing research firm conducted a random survey on perceptions of downtown Des Moines. Results revealed patrons rated street and sidewalk cleanliness in downtown Des Moines a four out of five.

The *Walk Your Butt to the Can* campaign has demonstrated proven findings of increased awareness of cigarette litter resulting in a cleaner and more environmentally friendly city thanks to the efforts of Operation Downtown and the partners involved with the campaign

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### **Project Critical Analysis**

#### **Innovation**

Operation Downtown customized the Keep America Beautiful Cigarette Litter Prevention Program with unique advertising and frequent communication with key groups.

Unique advertising opportunities were utilized including skywalk display advertising (near transition points), constant positive communication on the street with smokers, mint and t-shirt handouts, articles in newsletters and multiple mentions in emails and at a variety of district association, residential, and downtown business meetings. Operation Downtown handed out mints to smokers instead of pocket ashtrays.

We worked closely with Human Resource departments of downtown corporations to 1) make sure smoking areas are available, designated, and publicized to their employees and 2) to publicize the importance of cigarette litter prevention by the use of the *Walk Your Butt to the Can* campaign.

The Downtown Community Alliance devoted a section of the DowntownDesMoines.com web site to the campaign, making it easy to access information. It included the proclamation, litter statistics, an email template for corporate communicators, poster, letter from the Downtown Community Alliance President, and even a place to suggest ash urn locations.

#### **Replication**

Keep America Beautiful has already prepared a detailed template on how any organization can implement the Cigarette Litter Prevention Program. Operation Downtown then added concepts to tailor the program to better meet the challenges we faced. Unique advertising modes and frequent communication with property managers and Human Resource departments are two additions easily replicated in other communities. We have already had calls from other communities requesting the use of our *Walk Your Butt to the Can* marketing materials. One marketing concept we were unable to do but feel could be a powerful and inexpensive message, was to communicate the message on the sidewalk with a stencil and sidewalk paint where littered cigarette butts were often found.

#### **Representation**

Operation Downtown works very closely with the City of Des Moines on multiple projects and the *Walk Your Butt to the Can* campaign was no exception. The Mayor was involved in the planning stage and kicked off the campaign by signing a proclamation and placing the first ash urn. Keep Iowa Beautiful and Metro Waste Authority helped fund the campaign and included the information in newsletters and websites. We also worked with board members, corporate Human Resource departments, property managers, neighborhood associations, retail committees, district associations, community leaders, and even frequently used downtown landscaping vendors to publicize awareness. It was important to include downtown businesses in the project by encouraging them to review their designated smoking areas and/or nearby gathering points for smokers.

#### **Outcome**

Eight problem areas were identified and surveyed. Cigarette butts were counted in each of these areas before, during, and after the campaign. Overall, cigarette litter in these study areas was reduced 51 percent.

An independent marketing research firm conducted a random survey on perceptions of downtown Des Moines. Results revealed patrons rated street and sidewalk cleanliness in downtown Des Moines a four out of five. The survey also had many positive comments to open-ended questions about the cleanliness of downtown Des Moines.

Another project goal was to get downtown companies to evaluate their facility grounds and adjacent public property to determine how they could help reduce cigarette butt litter. Businesses followed Operation Downtown's lead by purchasing and placing ash urns at transition points for patrons. One large downtown corporation that has a smoke-free campus recently solicited our help in creating a smoking area off campus, but still within fairly close proximity to help alleviate cigarette litter problems in public areas around their property.

### **Conclusion**

The increase in non-smoking ordinances, laws, and smoke-free companies has greatly impacted cigarette litter in downtown Des Moines. Though we did a final cigarette butt count to evaluate results, the project is ongoing. Operation Downtown is continually monitoring cigarette litter, ordering additional ash urns, and strategically placing them at key locations in downtown Des Moines, and advertising will continue. Ambassadors will continue to educate the public on ash urn locations and encourage suggestions.

Results demonstrate that the *Walk Your Butt to the Can* campaign was educational, and hopefully habit changing for both downtown patrons and corporations.