

# Santa Monica Lookout

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## International Students Discover Santa Monica's “Community Ashtray”

By Lookout Staff

*August 12, 2013* -- A group of eight middle school and high school students from Beijing have discovered that Santa Monica's smokers have some cleaning up to do.

The eight students collected nearly 2,000 cigarette butts from around the Pier, on the beach and on neighborhood streets as part of summer research with the new Splash into Science study abroad program, started by Santa Monica High School science teacher Benjamin Kay.

So, where are smokers throwing their spent butts? The answer may not be all that surprising.

“Based the students’ data, we can definitively identify a ‘community ashtray,’” said Kay.

That ashtray is “the one meter wide strip of sand adjacent to the boardwalk, especially between the Casa Del Mar Hotel and the Santa Monica Pier,” he said.

Of the three sites studied, that strip of land had the highest concentration of butts, averaging one found in every two square meters.

But the butts were not distributed evenly. In fact, students found concentrations of cigarette butts three to four times higher the closer they got to the Pier, likely a result of heavier foot traffic in the area.

The residential site -- Bay Street, Bicknell Avenue and Pacific Street between Third Street and Main Street -- didn't fair much better, according to the students who counted an average on butt for every three square meters.

“Closer examination of the residential data revealed that streets of similar length possessed highly varied cigarette butt abundance, with Bicknell Ave leading as most polluted, possibly due to the presence of more multi-unit complexes,” according to the students' results.

A break-down of the residential zone butt count holds up the correlation between multi-unit housing and the presence of cigarette butts.

“Breaking the data up per residence, the multi-unit building at 229 Bicknell Ave was the record polluter with 77 butts, 97% of which were found in the street within one meter of the curb,” the results said. “Corner residences that merge with Main St had the next highest abundances ranging from 17 to 46 butts per property.”

But where there are fewer people, there also seems to be fewer cigarette butts.

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Of the three zones, the “sandy beach” site -- a strip of beach between Bay Street and Hollister -- showed an average of one butt in every 13 square meters, though that only takes into account butts that were visible and not buried in the sand, Kay said.

There are implications to the students' findings, Kay said. The data could help “with strategic placement of litter abatement devices, which would greatly reduce cigarette butts that end in the ocean,” Kay said.

The cigarette butt project was only one of several in which a total of 26 international students -- all from China -- participated this summer through the Splash into Science program.

Other student projects focused on plankton, shore birds, and sand crabs. Those projects were led by Samohi teacher, Ingo Gaida and Get Inspired Inc. founder, Nancy Caruso, a marine biologist.

“Students presented their research to all program participants and SMMUSD school board member, Ben Allen,” officials said.



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