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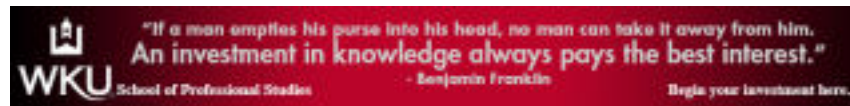
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Kicking butts: WKU students organize cigarette cleanup

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 21 min ago



With a plastic Ziploc bag and a pair of gloves, Western Kentucky University student Emma Wafzig set out across the campus Wednesday, participating in a campuswide cigarette butt cleanup.

In less than 30 minutes, the Louisville senior returned with several discarded cigarette filters and at least two empty boxes. The contents of the bag were placed in a free-standing plexiglass display meant to show the level of cigarette use on campus.

She had searched around Tate Page Hall, one of several locations on campus that has a designated smoking area where smokers are required to use waste receptacles, according to the university's smoking policy

The cleanup was part of national Kick Butts Day, and Wafzig hopes to push the campus to go further than just adopting a limited smoking ban.

"I think WKU should be a tobacco-free campus," she said, adding that, in her view, the designated smoking areas don't go far enough. "I think people who smoke don't really care."

More than 100 students signed up for the cleanup, according to Mackenzie Pennington, a graduate student from Glendale. It was organized by the Tobacco-Free Taskforce, as the second of two events held this semester by the group.

Formed last fall, the group of employee and student representatives shares information on smoking cessation programs for employees and builds support for a tobacco-free policy through forums, petitions, presentations and social media, according to the group's website. The group plans to present a policy to WKU's Board of Regents in May, according to an article on the university's website.

According to a campus smoking policy that dates to 2012, WKU has a list of 30 designated smoking areas on campus.

However, in 2015, then-President Gary Ransdell announced a three-phase plan to ban all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, on campus by 2018. The first phase of the plan, effective Jan. 1, 2016, was to limit the number of smoking areas on campus to 12.

But limiting smoking to a few designated areas on campus doesn't go far enough, Pennington said.

"Those aren't really enforced or followed," she said of the smoking areas.

Pennington would like to see the entire campus ban tobacco products, including e-cigarettes or vaping products, which she argues creates new addicts.

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To further make the case for going tobacco-free, Pennington cited a recent observational study that sent students across campus to count the number of cigarette butts they found.

Pennington said they found cigarette butts on the ground in designated smoking areas, including near Tate Page Hall.

“It’s probably one of the areas that we found the most cigarette butts,” she said.

Oneisha Newell, a senior from Somerset, teamed up with her friend Taylor Bender, a senior from Louisville, for the cleanup. The two were picking up cigarette filters scattered along the fence next to the Downing Student Union loading dock.

It reflected a pattern for Newell, who said the two were finding a lot of litter in areas used by adults, rather than students. By participating in the cleanup, she hoped to inspire healthier habits on campus, she said.

“We don’t want anyone picking up this habit of smoking or polluting,” Newell said.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

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