

## **Old shoes offer soles for playgrounds, ball courts**

Recycling helps close loop on products, supporters explain

By Julia Rogers, Correspondent

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Several companies and cities in Ventura County have joined with the National Recycling Coalition and sportswear maker Nike in a program to recycle old tennis shoes into sports surfaces and playground materials.

"Our goal is to collect 5,000 pairs of shoes so that when they are converted into playground equipment, then the shoes can very possibly come back here and still be of service," said Grahame Watts of the Thousand Oaks Public Works Department. "Whenever new items are added to any recycling program, that provides a positive environmental impact."

The Reuse-a-Shoe program takes used athletic shoes of any brand and grinds them up to give them new life as athletic surfaces and other products.

When ground, different parts of a shoe are reused in different ways. Rubber from the outsole can be used to cover fields and weight room floors. Foam from a shoe's midsoles are used for synthetic basketball courts, tennis courts and playground surfacing tiles. The granulated fabric from the shoes' upper parts becomes the padding under hardwood basketball floors.

The goal of the program is to close the loop on a product's lifecycle, said Kate Krebs, director of the the National Recycling Coalition.

"In my work, I'm always looking for creative and innovative ways to add new items to recycling programs," Krebs said. "But that can't happen without the help of companies like Nike that offset some of the costs. In this program, Nike is paying the costs of transporting the shoes to their recycling facilities, where they will be turned into new products. That is an excellent example of closing the recycling loop."

So far, the program is working well, said Bob Hinkle, manager of Cal U Rent in Thousand Oaks.

"The bin we use is 4 foot deep and it fills up quickly," Hinkle said. "Since we rent trucks for people who are moving, they all are happy to donate their old shoes. We fill it up about every week or two. It's such a good program, that people are more than willing to get involved in it."

There are five shoe drops in Ventura County. They are the Whole Foods Market Center, 451 E. Avenida de Los Arboles; Cal U Rent, 661 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.; the former Home Depot Center, 123 Ventu Park Road, all in Thousand

Oaks. In Simi Valley there's G.I. Industries, 195 W. Los Angeles Ave.; and in Ventura, Gold Coast Recycling Center at 5275 Colt St.

For information, call 449-2453.