

case study: pollution prevention

PET WASTE PICK-UP

background

Action Research worked with the City of Oceanside Clean Water Program to develop a community-based social marketing campaign aimed at decreasing the amount of dog waste left along the San Luis Rey River Trail. The existing program consisted of signage that emphasized legal fines and health hazards associated with pet waste left on the trail.

purpose

The goal of this pilot was to prevent bacteria from entering the river by encouraging residents who walk their dogs on the trail to pick up their dogs' waste.

approach

CBSM is based upon research which demonstrates that behavior change is often most effectively achieved through initiatives delivered at the community level that focus on removing barriers to a target behavior while simultaneously enhancing the behavior's benefits. The approach incorporates behavior change tools drawn from the social sciences.

This pilot included baseline and follow-up observations of pet waste along the trail, a mail survey of residents to identify barriers and benefits, efforts to overcome structural barriers, and enhanced signage to highlight benefits.

1: Select the Target Behavior

In order to identify the best mechanism for reaching the target population, we conducted a brief intercept survey of trail users to identify the characteristics of the people who visited the trail.

⇒ **Dog waste pick-up** by dog owners in the surrounding neighborhoods was selected as the target behavior. The survey showed that the majority of trail users lived in close proximity to the trail access points suggesting that our outreach efforts should focus on the local community.

2: Identify Barriers and Benefits

We conducted a mail survey of a random sample of residents living in the community surrounding the trail. The survey focused on current behavior, dog ownership, and barriers and benefits to picking up after dogs on the trail.

⇒ **Barriers:** forgetting to bring a dog-waste bag and lack of trash cans for throwing away the waste.

⇒ **Benefits:** social responsibility and belief that it is the right thing to do.

3: Develop Strategies

The strategy utilized increased infrastructure and posted signs that highlighted the identified benefits.

⇒ **Structural barriers** were addressed by placing bag dispensers and trash cans at trail access points.

⇒ **Signage** was redesigned to highlight social responsibility benefits as well as to clearly demonstrate the desired behavior.

4: Pilot Test

We pilot tested the strategies using a controlled field experiment. We counted the number of dog waste piles in the pilot (strategy) and matched control (no change) areas before and after installation of the dispensers, signage, and trash cans.

⇒ **Results:** The program produced a 23% decrease in the amount of dog waste piles left on the trail in the study area compared to control areas which did not change.

5: Implement Broadly and Evaluate

Widespread implementation will be most successful if bag dispensers, signage, and trash cans are maintained and strategically placed where there is evidence of dog waste. Ongoing evaluation would include periodic counts of dog waste and water monitoring for bacteria levels.

