THE CLIENT
A hydro electric construction project in northern Quebec that started in 2009 and will finish in 2021/2022. At the camp we have 97 dorms made up of 1682 rooms. In the winter we support about 300-400 people but in the summer, we typically house around 1200 people.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE: CIGARETTE BUTT COLLECTION
We have created a cigarette butt collection system at our camp to help prevent fires due to the improper disposal or discarding of butts, and because we know that they take years to degrade and when littered on the ground, they can easily make their way into our waterways.

BACKGROUND
One area that had become problematic was cigarette butts in the camp. We knew this was something we had to address, because even one butt on the ground pollutes up to 500 litres of water and 1 metric cube of soil and it also harms the cleanliness of the camp.

While most of a cigarette’s filling and paper wrapping disintegrate when smoked, not everything gets burned. Cigarette butts take years to degrade and when littered on the ground, they can easily make their way into our waterways and soil. They leach toxic chemicals, such as arsenic and lead, and the filters contain tiny pieces of plastic, called microplastics, negatively impacting the environment, plant and animal life.

We knew that we could help with this issue by setting up proper cigarette butt disposal areas throughout the camp.

CHALLENGES
Habits are hard to change – especially if you are a little bit older like a lot of the people working and living at the camp. We had to stay on top of things and help people make the extra effort to throw their butts in the proper disposal areas. It is still not 100% successful but we are making a difference in a small way.
SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPION

SUCCESSES

We installed disposal areas in the camp at the entrance to the cafeteria that look like giant cigarettes with an ashtray around them and we also recycle 100 oz cans from the kitchen and put them around the camp. There is a lot of signage with some statistics to educate people on the harm of just throwing the butts on the ground.

In the spring when the snow melts there is an organized clean up effort on a Sunday (when most people aren’t working) to clean up the camp and the volunteers get a voucher that can be used at the restaurant as an extra incentive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We work directly with the client on sustainability initiatives. Generally, they take the lead and we support them as much as possible. This is a remote camp with a population that fluctuates, and our small staff of 68 people can get very busy during certain times, so we are always looking for the best way to implement or support projects with the resources that we have.

My advice for others like us is to focus on communication and collaboration with the client. See what they can do and what they want to do and then work with them to come up with ideas and initiatives that make sense. It can be very positive.