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The soul of these old soles lives on

*Nike's Reuse-a-Shoe program turns worn-out sneakers into athletic
faces here and abroad*

Keywords

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Any

Writer

It's spring cleaning time, and you've just cleared out your closet. What do you do with your worn-out running shoes?



Used athletic shoes dropped off at shoe stores are ground up in Wilsonville before they're turned into new tracks, fields and floor padding.
COURTESY OF NIKE INC.

Donate them to Reuse-a-Shoe.

Nike's Reuse-a-Shoe program, started in 1993, takes used athletic shoes and recycles the materials into sport playing surfaces – from professional courts to play areas in more than 250 underserved communities around the world.

“It's an inspirational and innovative recycling program that contributes to the improvement of children's lives by increasing their access to sports,” says Simon Lofts, senior manager for Nike's Reuse-a-Shoe and Nike Grind.

Reuse-a-Shoe grew out of a need for a sustainable way to deal with Nike production waste and defective shoes returned by customers.

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“Disposing of anything is an unsustainable behavior in the world we live in with resource constraints,” Lofts says, pointing out that shoes are made of materials that do not decompose rapidly. “There are millions of shoes that go to the landfill every year.”



Oregon has nearly 20 athletic stores participating in Reuse-a-Shoe. Two of those are Portland Running Co.’s Beaverton and Southeast stores.



“We’re a fairly major drop-off point,” says Chris Hollis, who manages the Beaverton store. He estimates Portland Running Co. takes in about 25 pairs of shoes each week for Reuse-a-Shoe.



“When spring cleaning comes around, we get everybody’s old shoes,” he says.



“We suggest that people simply bring their old shoes with them when they’re shopping for their new pair,” says Bob Applegate, Oregon communications director for Nike. He emphasizes that the program is not exclusive to Nike products – as long as the shoes don’t contain metal, any and all brands are welcome.



“We don’t discriminate when it comes to reusing,” says Applegate, who admits he has several pairs of old shoes stacking up at home.



Put 'em through the grinder



Donated shoes are separated into core components – upper fabric, midsole foam and outsole rubber – and these materials literally are ground up. The result is Nike Grind, used in creating new sport surfaces.



Nike Grind Rubber is used in running tracks and baseball and soccer fields. Nike Grind Upper Fabric becomes padding under hardwood basketball floors. Nike Grind Foam goes into synthetic basketball courts, tennis courts and playground surfaces.



“It’s a really holistic way to manage a company’s environmental footprint,” Lofts says.



There are Nike Grind facilities in Europe and Asia, and Wilsonville is home to the Nike Grind facility that serves the United States.



“All the defective shoes that come back from consumers, and all the worn-out shoes that are collected around the U.S., they all get shipped back to Wilsonville,” Lofts says.



To incorporate Nike Grind into sport surfaces and other products, Nike has become partners with FieldTurf, Connor Sport Court, Rebound Ace and Portland-based Atlas Track and Tennis.

“We’ve got a lot of running tracks out there now, made by Atlas, that contain Nike Grind,” Lofts says, including the track on the Nike campus and another at Lincoln High School.

Jeff Peeler, Lincoln High School’s athletic director, says the entire community benefits from the track, with joggers out on it every day from dawn to dusk.

“It’s a great surface,” he says. “It’s got a bounce to it.”

Nike contributed \$170,000 to the \$1.2 million refurbished track and field at Lincoln.

“Having such an amazing track at Lincoln High School has been not only an asset to the high school itself but to the entire district,” says Lincoln track coach Charlotte Richardson. “It’s been a wonderful, wonderful program.”

“It’s nice material,” Hollis says of running on the Nike Grind track at

Portland State University, where he went to school. He says he's donated nearly 25 pairs of his own worn-out shoes to Reuse-a-Shoe.

"The whole concept of giving back to the community is great," says Hollis, who likes the fact that old shoes can have new life again. "I go through a lot of shoes. If I'm not going to wear that shoe, it's so old and beat up that it's no good to me anymore, why should it sit in my closet?"

Old shoes make balls, too

In 2002, Nike celebrated its 30th anniversary by resurfacing nearly 90 courts in more than 30 Portland parks with recycled Nike Grind materials from Reuse-a-Shoe.

Lofts hopes that these projects will give kids greater environmental awareness, as well as teach life skills through sports.

"We're looking to really connect the dots between benefiting groups, benefiting the environment and benefiting communities all in the same holistic program," he says.

Another Nike Grind project was the design and creation of a soccer ball for the U.N. Refugee Agency, NineMillion.org.

"It's about the children in refugee camps and how soccer can be brought to them to give them hope and help improve their lives," Lofts says. "So we made a ball using Nike Grind."

Applegate and Lofts say 40,000 of the soccer balls – designed to be more durable and robust for harsh camp conditions – were donated to refugee camps all over the world on World Refugee Day in 2006.

With both service to the greater community and reduction of Nike's environmental footprint, Lofts says that Reuse-a-Shoe is one of Nike's favorite programs.

"People inside Nike adore it," Lofts says. "It just typifies some of the really sincere people in Nike and their desire to do good."

So pack up your old trainers and find a Reuse-a-Shoe drop-off location near you. Your worn-out athletic shoes could make their way into a world-class professional running track – or they could find new use helping to change the life of a child on the other side of the world, or right here in Portland.

Nike drop-off sites

To find the Reuse-a-Shoe drop-off center nearest you, visit Nike Grind online at

www.nikegrind.com.

Or ship your shoes directly to Nike:

Nike Recycling Center

c/o Reuse-a-Shoe

26755 S.W. 95th Ave.

Wilsonville, OR 97070

Time for spring cleaning?

Some of these companies and organizations charge a recycling fee or offer scheduled pick-ups only, instead of a drop-off location.

Yard waste

- City Bark Recycling

www.compostproducts.com

- Pacific Land Clearing

www.plcrecycling.com

- Grimm's Fuel Co.

www.grimmsfuel.com/recycling.htm

Old bikes

- Community Cycling Center

www.communitycyclingcenter.org

Refurbishes and recycles donated bikes

Shipping and packing supplies (including packing peanuts)

- Carton Service Boxes

www.cartononline.com/buyback.php

- PDX Shipper

www.pdxshipper.com

Appliances

- JACO Environmental

www.jacoinc.net

- Quantum Resource Recovery

www.quantumresource.com

- Community Warehouse

www.communitywarehouse.org

Paint

- Metro Paint

www.metro-region.org/article.cfm?articleid=521

Computers and Electronics

- Computer Drive Connection

www.computerdriveconnection.com

- Call to Protect

www.wirelessfoundation.org/CalltoProtect

Recycles wireless phones to benefit survivors of domestic violence

- E Tech Recycling

www.etechrecycling.com

- Earth Protection Services

www.earthpro.com

- Free Geek

www.freegeek.org

- Green Disk

www.greendisk.com

- Gresham Computer Recycling and Education Center

www.greshamcomputerrecycling.com

Fluorescent Lamps

- EcoLights Northwest

www.ecolights.com

For a more complete list of recyclers in the Metro Portland region, visit www.metro-region.org.

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