

Contra Costa Times Your Turn: All must do our part on litter

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Your Turn**

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Litter in Danville? Because we live in such a seemingly clean community, if you'd asked me this question just a few years ago, I would have said an emphatic no.

But not too long ago, I was assigned to be in charge of closing a field after my son's soccer game, and the assignment included picking up trash.

I thought trash pickup would be an easy job, but found the amount of "little" litter flying around -- like the juice box straw wrappers and foil treat wrappers -- surprising.

And while more and more people seem to be using reusable water containers, I could still see a half-dozen empty water bottles and lids in the grass, alongside empty coffee drink remnants and napkins.

I picked up as much as I could, but surely missed some pieces that had blown away.

A few years ago, I became aware of a countywide watershed program that helps reduce litter in the community. Reflecting on my field cleanup experience and realizing that the problem likely exists at many of the outdoor soccer, football, rugby, baseball, etc., games in the Bay Area, I could see how litter begins to add up.

And now that I am more aware of litter, I notice it in more and more places. I especially notice how it piles up in the storm drains we pass by on our way to and from school each day.

My neighbor often picks up the debris in the drains near our home, but she can't get everything -- who knows where it goes from there?

When my kids were toddlers, I remember worrying that they would pick up colorful wrappers or curious cigarette butts they found on the ground. In our busy lives we often don't notice how much cigarette litter falls into sidewalk cracks and onto the grass, seeming to wait for kids to pick them up, or to be blown into storm drains.

The litter that goes down the storm drains ends up in our watersheds and, eventually, the Bay and the ocean. Along the way, this trash affects habitats and those of us who enjoy our lakes, streams, Bay and ocean.

With a looming and lasting budget crisis, I realize that we can't rely on our cities to pick up all of our litter. That needs to start upstream -- with us.

So as my family ramps up for our summer activities, I'm hoping more recreational leagues and teams look at the types of snacks provided at games (and the trash they create), as well as assigning "litter champions" who are in charge of keeping our sports fields litter-free and in good shape. Because even if you don't participate in these sports, you can still be affected by what's left behind.

There are many great resources for keeping litter out of our communities at CCCleanWater.org.

I love our neighborhood and the Bay Area as a whole. I'm appreciative of organizations like the Contra Costa Clean Water Program that help get the word out reminding people that litter travels, but it can stop with me, my kids and all of you.