

UC SANTA BARBARA

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[Keith Hamm](#)

UCSB environmental studies team launches tire recycling program at A.S. Bike Shop

As a public university that's been on the cutting edge of environmental issues for decades, it may come as a surprise that the Associated Students Bike Shop at UC Santa Barbara has been throwing away old tires for nearly as long.

That's changing with the recent launch of TREAD (Tire Recovery Education and Diversion), a bike tire recycling program created by undergraduate students Sophia Long and Virginia Such, both in their second year as environmental studies majors.

"When Virginia and Sophia brought this idea to me, I was just so grateful," said Adam Jahnke, manager of the [A.S. Bike Shop](#), founded in 1975. Today, roughly half of UCSB's 26,000 students rely on bicycles for daily transportation. "The bicycle industry creates so much waste, and it's a circle I've been trying to square for a decade. Their program is really such a breath of fresh air."

Jahnke, who's been running the shop since 2014, remembers past efforts "trying hard to divert tires and tubes from landfills" by teaming up with student-led [A.S. Recycling](#) and an outside vendor contracted to collect used automotive tires from campus facilities. That effort fizzled out "after about a year," Jahnke said, mainly because of the increasingly expensive pick-up cost shouldered by the shop. Also for a short time, the shop shipped old tires and tubes to Seattle-based Alchemy Goods,

but the upcycler couldn't handle the volume. "We've been landfilling tires ever since — until now," Jahnke said.

Long and Such were friends in preschool, reconnected at UCSB and teamed up on TREAD last fall in the [Environmental Leadership Incubator](#) (ELI), a nine-month program for undergraduates to pinpoint an environmental concern and implement a solution.

"Our first idea was to use old bike tires to make flip flops," Such said. "But as we looked into it, we found that they were throwing out so many tires."

"So we changed our effort to recycling, just to address that basic issue," Long added. "And long term, it's a better approach so that our project can live on."

They launched TREAD with a \$5000 alumni grant from Such's high school, Battle Ground Academy, in Nashville.

After that seed money dries up, "I fully expect the bike shop to pay for the program to continue," Jahnke said. In terms of tire turnover, shop mechanics performed upward of 3000 repairs during the fall quarter of 2025 and roughly 60% of that work included replacement tires and tubes.

As shop mechanics swap out old tires, they stuff them into cardboard boxes and pay Liberty Tire Recycling \$25 per box for pick up. In Los Angeles, the tires are processed into fuel for industrial kilns and boilers, and crumb rubber for playgrounds and athletic tracks, among other uses.

TREAD is the latest in a run of student-led recycling programs at UCSB, including [shoes](#), [athletic equipment](#) and [laboratory plastics](#), all of which emerged from the ELI program.

Media Contact

Keith Hamm

Social Sciences, Humanities & Fine Arts Writer

(805) 893-2191

keithhamm@ucsb.edu

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