



When the Rubber Leaves the Road— Don't Toss That Tube!

Bicycle Inner Tubes are flexible, round rubber tubes that keep bike tires inflated and provide a cushiony ride. When an inner tube gets a puncture and goes flat it shouldn't go straight into the garbage. Rubber is strong and long lasting and if a tube can't be patched, it can still have other uses.

Recycling tubes is much better than burying in a landfill or burning, but it requires additional energy and neglects the unique identity of the material.

Reusing tubes has the benefit of existing shapes, flexibility, water resistance, and other surface qualities. Reusing materials conserves resources and reduces air and water pollution.

How Are Inner Tubes Made?

The first bike tubes were made with natural rubber from rubber trees in the Amazon, but today's tubes are made from petroleum (oil). Through heat and the addition of other ingredients, a completely human-made, or synthetic rubber material is made. Natural rubber is a renewable resource but petroleum is not.

How is rubber harmful for the environment?

Bike tube rubber is a very strong and flexible human-made material, but this makes it very difficult to destroy. Unlike other types of waste, like food or paper, rubber does not biodegrade so will not break down and go away. And we make a lot of it. Each year in San Francisco, approximately 100,000 tubes become waste and go to landfill. This is enough to wrap the Golden Gate Bridge 33 times. And when this kind of rubber is ground up it can become microplastics that pollute our environment.

What is a product lifecycle?

A simple product lifecycle has 4 steps:

1. Source the material
2. Make the product
3. Use the product
4. Reuse the material, recycle it or throw it away

To keep some of this rubber material going in a cycle we need to reuse inner tubes because right now they can't go in the recycling bins.

How can rubber be used more responsibly?

Patch, reuse, and recycle the tubes. Do not put in the garbage or the landfill.

The Rubber Impact Project seeks to engage students of all ages, as well as the broader public, to adopt a mindset and culture of reuse; to create a waste flow that incorporates reuse of inner tube rubber into a circular rubber ecology; and to pressure the rubber industry to move toward greater sustainability and environmental responsibility.

The Rubber Impact Project is the recipient of the 2019 IMPACT Award from California College of the Art's Center for IMPACT. The IMPACT Award recognizes groundbreaking approaches and solutions in the field of sustainability and social impact through the lens of art & design.

For more information please visit www.rubberimpact.net

