

Group hopes recycled hotel soap helps save lives worldwide

April 10 2015, by Brian Skoloff



In this March 20, 2015, photo, A box of used bars of soap ready to be ground up are seen at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)

Shawn Seipler is on a mission to save lives with soap.

It began about seven years ago as a tiny operation with a few friends and family in a single-car garage in Orlando, Florida, where they used meat

grinders, potato peelers and cookers to recycle used soap into fresh bars.

The nonprofit initiative, now called Clean the World, has since grown to include industrial recycling facilities in Las Vegas, Orlando and Hong Kong, cities where hotels are plentiful and used bars of soap can be gathered easily by the thousands.

A frequent traveler as a tech company employee, Seipler had a thought one night at a Minneapolis hotel.

"I picked up the phone and called the front desk and asked them what happens to the bar of soap when I'm done using it," he recalled. "They said they just threw it away."

Seipler, now the group's CEO, said some research revealed that millions of used bars of soap from hotels worldwide are sent to landfills every day while many people in developing nations are dying from illnesses that could be prevented with access to simple hygiene products.



In this March 20, 2015, photo, Aaron Weatherly collects newly formed soap at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)

Thus began his mission to help save lives with soap and even half-used bottled amenities like shampoo.

"It's a huge problem," said Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine and an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. "One of the most common kinds of illnesses in the world are those that are transmitted from person to person and to oneself because of germs that are on one's hands."

In the U.S. and other developed nations, Schaffner noted, people take hygiene products for granted because they are everywhere—soap in

public restrooms and even cleanser wipes at the entrances of grocery stores to sanitize shopping cart handles.

Not so in some other countries. Schaffner recalled visiting a hospital in the Middle East to find soap was in such short supply that patients had to provide their own or go without.

"It's such a fundamental part of the interruption of transmission of infectious agents that could save so many lives," he said. "It's not a magic wand, but it's a very important element."



In this March 20, 2015, photo, Jabir Hennix, left, and Sia Leleua grind up used bars of soap at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)

Clean the World announced this week that it was partnering with the

similar Global Soap organization to increase production, hygiene education and delivery.

The combined group now collects used soap from more than 4,000 hotels and says it has delivered some 25 million bars to 99 countries, including homeless shelters in the U.S.

The process is fairly simple, with the collected soap getting shredded, run through machines that remove any residual bacteria and then pressed into new bars and packaged for delivery.



In this March 20, 2015, photo, Jabir Hennix, right, and Sia Leleua grind up used bars of soap at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)

The group uses local aid and non-governmental organizations to help

with distribution and education, as well as sending their own teams into rural communities around the world to hand-deliver hygiene products and to teach residents about the importance of keeping clean.

"A lot of people are surprised to find out that one of the most effective ways to prevent many deaths is actually just hand-washing with soap," Global Soap director Sam Stephens said. "We're hoping to make a difference."



In this March 20, 2015, photo, Jabir Hennix grinds up used bars of soap at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)



In this March 20, 2015, photo, ground up and cleaned soap moves on a conveyer at Clean the World in Las Vegas. The non-profit initiative recycles soap from hotels to distribute in developing countries. (AP Photo/John Locher)

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