



# Greening Your Big Finding Help in All the Right Places

By Janice Johnson



This festival in Boise, Idaho, used a banner to alert fairgoers to the location of "ecostations" where they can drop off their recyclable materials. These collapsible recycling bins and the overhead banner are on loan from the city.

Credit: City of Boise

Festivals, fairs, concerts, sporting events, and parades bring communities together. Unfortunately, they also generate large amounts of trash — a 2005 California study<sup>1</sup> found that participants at public events generate 2.5 pounds of waste per day on average. The good news is that much of this waste is recyclable. By implementing a recycling program at your special event, you can enhance your event's reputation, cut costs, and reduce your event's impact on the environment.

**Enhance Your Reputation.** Recycling programs reduce the unsightly litter that makes your event less appealing. In addition, providing recycling options makes for happier attendees; many people recycle in their homes and workplaces and expect to find recycling bins for their empty plastic bottles and soda cans when they go to special events.

**Reduce Your Impact.** Recycling reduces your event's impact on the environment. Recycling conserves natural resources, saves energy, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions generated by extracting raw materials. Establishing a sustainable recycling program is a visible way to make a difference.

**Cut Costs.** Recycling can save you money too! For example, in 2002 and every year since, Del Mar Fairgrounds in San Diego County, CA, has reached a 97 percent diversion rate (meaning that only 3 percent of the waste generated is disposed as waste). In 2007, Del Mar generated more than \$70,600 from the sale of recyclables.

<sup>1</sup>Targeted Statewide Waste Characterization Study: Waste Disposal and Diversion Findings for Selected Industry Groups, California Integrated Waste Management Board, June 2006.



Handed out at an Earth Day festival in Milwaukee, this cup is imprinted with the message: "Please reuse this cup so we can continue to use this planet."

Credit: Chris Beimborn, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition

### Tips for Recycling Success

**Prevent Waste in the First Place.** One of the most important changes you can institute at your event is waste prevention. By reducing waste at its source, you can reduce your purchasing and sanitation costs. For example, offering beverage refills using an existing beverage cup instead of using a new cup can be a simple and effective way to save money on your cup purchases and reduce trash pickups. Furthermore, offering a souvenir cup enables event visitors to take home a reusable memento of your event.

When making purchasing decisions, remember to buy items that can be recycled, thereby reducing the creation of waste. For example, you could require food and beverage vendors to use recyclable or compostable foodservice ware.

**Start Small.** A good rule of thumb when starting anything new is to start slowly and keep it simple. Try to make minor adjustments in things you already do. For example, you can reduce paper use by sending contracts, invitations, and other event documentation electronically whenever possible and by using the internet to post information. When you do print documents, use the double-sided option. When you produce events, think

about creating signs that could be reused for multiple events or from year to year.

**Work with Event Vendors.** Roberta Miller, Program Manager with the StopWaste Partnership, recommends asking vendors and service providers how to reduce waste and increase recycling efficiency. "That way you get buy-in from the outset as the ideas come from those who implement them," she says. In addition, recycling can begin before the materials ever reach the public. Asking vendors to recycle cardboard is a good way to get started. Recycling cardboard is easy because it doesn't require materials to be separated, and it's done outside of the public eye, which gives you time to gain experience and work out the kinks in your program.

**Get Management Buy-In.** "It takes commitment from the top down to implement a recycling program," says Denise Hamler, Director of Green Festival, a joint project of Global Exchange and Co-op America. Hamler recommends that management commitment be conveyed and shared by other participants in the planning process and by event stakeholders.

### Tap Into Community Resources

Take advantage of the environmental knowledge and expertise available in your community. Check with your city or county solid waste, public works, or environmental resources department and ask to speak to a recycling coordinator or solid waste manager. Your local coordinator can help you determine which materials can be recycled in your community, identify markets for them, and help you find composting and recycling facilities and haulers. In addition, many agencies can loan recycling containers and signage for your event.

For example Vermont event planners can go to the Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) for assistance with recycling. A CSWD staff member walks through the site with event staff, talks with the event's waste hauler, and offers advice on how to best meet recycling requirements and set up compost collection. Over the past several years, the CSWD outreach coordinator has been advising the Champlain Valley Exposition, which hosts an annual seven-day fair attended by about 300,000 people, on methods to increase and streamline collection of recyclables and compostables.

CSWD also will supply, on request, recycling and food scrap containers and signage. In turn, the sponsoring group agrees to provide staff or volunteers to collect recyclables and prevent contamination, inform vendors and exhibitors of recycling requirements, and provide or pay for transportation of the recyclables to the appropriate facility. Some events assisted by

### NOT RECYCLABLE HERE!



food



styrofoam



paper plates, cups & napkins



plastic bags



pet waste

CSWD CHITTENDEN Solid Waste District (802) 872-8111 www.cswd.net  
Need bins for your event? Call 872-8111

### RECYCLE HERE!



bottles & cans



clean paper, cardboard & boxboard



plastic packaging, tubs & jugs

CSWD CHITTENDEN Solid Waste District (802) 872-8111 www.cswd.net  
Need bins for your event? Call 872-8111

The Chittenden Solid Waste District uses these posters to let event attendees know which items can and cannot be recycled.

Credit: Chittenden Solid Waste District



**LEFT:** This collapsible recycling bin with a transparent bag enables the public to see immediately that it is a bin for bottles and cans. It was placed beside food vendors and picnic tables at the Maxwell Street Days Flea Market in Waukesha County.

Credit: Meribeth Sullivan, Waukesha County

**BELOW:** The tops of these collapsible recycling bins have three openings sized to accept beverage containers. The label "Plastic Bottles Aluminum Cans," coupled with the recycling arrows and illustrations of cans and bottles, further reinforces the message.

Credit: Paul Abramson, Madison Recycling Away from Home



CSWD include the Vermont City Marathon, Haunted Forest, Dragon Boat Festival, Cancer Patient Support Program Ribbon Run, and several local harvest festivals.

Your waste hauler might also be able to provide helpful information about the types of collection containers best suited to your event, how and where to set up waste stations, and other aspects of waste management.

If your community doesn't have a recycling program in place, seek out environmental organizations that support recycling. These organizations can provide ideas and be helpful with messaging.

Free online toolkits are available to help you design programs to tackle trash, reduce waste, and recycle effectively. For example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's *Recycle on the Go* website offers tools, tips, case studies, and other resources for event organizers in the following sectors: festivals and fairs; transportation, including airports; shopping centers; and parks. The Wisconsin Be

Smart Coalition and California's Integrated Solid Waste Management Board also have developed comprehensive online toolkits. Addresses for these websites can be found throughout the article.

### **Volunteers, Containers, and Signage**

If you're considering tapping into your community for recycling support, start early. Below are tips on important elements of your recycling program—volunteers, containers, and signs—plus ideas and resources to help you obtain these without blowing your budget.

**Recruiting Volunteers.** Volunteers are key to the overall success of greening your event. To be effective, volunteers need proper training in waste management practices and should be included in the planning process. Because volunteers often play an important role in festivals and events, you might already have a pool of qualified people you can draw on to green your event.



## **ONLINE TOOLKITS**

EPA's *Recycle on the Go* website offers information on implementing recycling programs at both urban and rural special events, success stories, and fact sheets on how to include volunteers and involve concessionaires and vendors in your recycling program. [www.epa.gov/recycleonthego](http://www.epa.gov/recycleonthego)

### **Wisconsin Be Smart Coalition**

provides partner communities with information, resources, and hands-on planning support for special events through crew training, meetings with key players, and downloadable signs, press releases, and educational materials—including tips on souvenir cup reuse and refill programs. [www.besmart.org](http://www.besmart.org)

### **Wisconsin's Public Place Recycling Toolkit**

contains tips, tools, reports, and case studies derived from firsthand experiences of site coordinators, event planners, and municipal recycling coordinators. <http://besmart.org/publicplace-recycling>

### **California's Venues and Events**

website provides tools such as sample ordinances and policies, cost calculation spreadsheets, case studies, a solid waste reduction guide, and links to government and industry resources such as recycled-content product suppliers. The site also features other downloadable information useful for cities, counties, and regional agencies with venues and facilities for hosting special events or that issue event and park permits. [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/venues](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/venues)

Organizers of the award-winning recycling program at Massachusetts' Lowell Folk Festival enlist approximately 130 volunteers for the three-day event. Festival organizers reach out to volunteers in a number of ways:

- Internet message boards and the festival website
- Local newspapers and periodicals
- Local youth groups such as the YWCA Summer Youth Program and Lowell Boys and Girls Club
- Professional recycling coordinators word of mouth

Organizers personally phone participants and organizations to invite them to return each year, which increases repeat volunteering. Festival organizers thank each community group with a \$1,000 donation. The YWCA has helped the festival's recycling program since the beginning, so it also receives the profits from the collected beverage containers—about \$800 a year.

Other sources of volunteers include local environmental groups, youth leagues, churches, civic groups, singles groups, and the website [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org).

To keep your volunteers happy and eager to help out again, consider the following tips:

- Make them feel appreciated the day of the event (e.g., offer a free T-shirt, snacks, and soda)
- Send a letter of thanks from the mayor, other officials, or local heroes
- Present a plaque, certificate, coupons, or green gifts
- Write a newsletter or story for your local newspaper or on your website

*Finding Recycling Containers.* Having the right containers is critical to the success of recycling and composting at your event, but purchasing many of them at once can be expensive. Fortunately, some communities and state governments loan out containers and even offer banners and trailers for transporting recyclables. Check with your local recycling coordinator or hauler before to see if this option is available.

One example of this type of program is Georgia's Away From Home recycling program, which offers local governments a turnkey special event recycling kit that includes portable, reusable containers; a custom-designed carrier to transport the containers and bags; and an enclosed hitch trailer to store and transport all the materials to a recycling facility. Georgia environmental officials estimate that in 2008 the program will offer recycling



# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, CONTAINERS, AND MORE

## **The Recycling Bin Grant Program**

sponsored by the National Recycling Coalition and the Coca-Cola Company offers free recycling bins to government, civic, school, and nonprofit organizations, and for-profit companies. Interested parties complete an online application describing their proposals, justifying the needs, and specifying the bin types they are interested in. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis in the spring and fall. [www.bingrant.org](http://www.bingrant.org)

## **Boise, ID, Special Event Recycling Program**

offers event organizers recycling containers, bag liners, banners, frames, and information on conducting a successful recycling effort. Contact: Catherine Chertudi, Environmental Programs Manager, 208/384-3901, e-mail: [cchertudi@cityofboise.org](mailto:cchertudi@cityofboise.org). [www.cityofboise.org/Departments/Public\\_Works/EnvironmentalResourceCenter/SustainableandLiveable%20Boise/page22386.aspx](http://www.cityofboise.org/Departments/Public_Works/EnvironmentalResourceCenter/SustainableandLiveable%20Boise/page22386.aspx)

## **Chittenden, VT, Solid Waste District**

offers free, on-site technical assistance, containers, and signs. Contact: Marge Keough, Outreach Coordinator, 802/872-8100 x234, e-mail: [mkeough@cswd.net](mailto:mkeough@cswd.net). [www.cswd.net](http://www.cswd.net)

**Georgia's Away From Home** recycling program awards special event recycling kits to local governments and/or solid waste authorities.

Contact: Jennifer Szabo, Program Coordinator, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Office of Environmental Management, 404/679-0567, e-mail: [jszabo@dca.state.ga.us](mailto:jszabo@dca.state.ga.us). [www.dca.state.ga.us/development/EnvironmentalManagement](http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/EnvironmentalManagement)

## **Pittsburgh, PA, Special Event Recycling Program**

loans event organizers recycling containers and small trailers to store recyclables. Contact: City of Pittsburgh's Public Works Recycling Division, 412/255-2631. [www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/pw/html/special\\_event\\_recycling.html](http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/pw/html/special_event_recycling.html) Photo 8

## **Seattle, WA, Special Event Recycling Program**

offers free recycling bins, bag liners, gloves for volunteers, and garbage pickers for sorting non-recyclables from recyclables at. Contact: Seattle Public Utilities, 206/615-1700. [www.seattle.gov/util/Services/Garbage/Reduce\\_Garbage\\_&\\_Litter/Event\\_Recycling/index.asp](http://www.seattle.gov/util/Services/Garbage/Reduce_Garbage_&_Litter/Event_Recycling/index.asp)

## **St. Louis Earth Day**

a Missouri-based nonprofit, provides bins for use at events in St. Louis County. Contact: Terri Reilly, Executive Director, St. Louis Earth Day, 314/961-5838, e-mail: [tfr@stlouisearthday.org](mailto:tfr@stlouisearthday.org). [www.stlouisearthday.org](http://www.stlouisearthday.org)

## **Waukesha County, WI**

offers a free recycling bin loaner program. [www.waukeshacounty.gov/page.aspx?SetupMetaId=11064&id=15140](http://www.waukeshacounty.gov/page.aspx?SetupMetaId=11064&id=15140)

opportunities to about 4.5 million residents and visitors at some of the state's largest events, such as Atlanta's Peachtree Road Race, Macon, Georgia's International Cherry Blossom Festival, and University of Georgia football games.

"By offering recycling at places outside the home, the whole community benefits," says Jennifer Szabo, coordinator of Georgia's Community Affairs Program. "These programs not only teach people that recycling is important wherever they are, but they also strengthen the local economy by providing materials to recycling processors and end-users while helping event planners reduce the amount of litter at special events."

Other creative options for purchasing bins include cooperative purchasing, fundraising, and enlisting associations, such as chambers of commerce, to buy the bins and loan them to their members. Look for businesses willing to sponsor purchase of the bins in exchange for publicity, such as placing stickers or posters with their company names on the bins or offering advertising space in the festival program. Sometimes you can work with concession suppliers and vendors to support your efforts.

Recycling bins come in many shapes and sizes. Both the city of Madison and Waukesha County, WI, find that collapsible recycling bins with clear plastic bags work well at many types of short-term events. The transparent bags show visitors what types of materials can be recycled and enable event staff to see when bins need to be emptied. The collapsible frames also allow for compact storage when not in use.

*Finding Signs.* Effective signage is essential for clarifying which materials can be recycled and where to put them. Signs and posters must be kept simple. Try to leave off logos or dates—that way your signs can be reused at future events. Some other tips for effective signs include:

- Use photos or images with minimal text to illustrate where waste should go.
- Make sure signs can be seen above crowds.
- Consider printing signs in multiple languages.

You can download free standard recycling signs from Social Change Media at:

- <http://media.socialchange.net.au/recycling>

These signs also are available at:

- [www.besmart.org](http://www.besmart.org) (click on Public Place Recycling Toolkit).

Continued on page 67

**RIGHT:** Recycling bins come in many shapes and sizes. This one, in the shape of a plastic soda bottle, enabled visitors to recycle at an event for motorcycle enthusiasts. Also note the prominent recycling signage posted on the bin.

Credit: Chris Beimborn, Wisconsin Be SMART Coalition

**BELOW:** The city of Pittsburgh loans this trailer to event organizers to help them store recyclables during their programs.

Credit: City of Pittsburgh Public Works Recycling Division



**RIGHT:** Volunteers at the 2008 National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C., help keep the festival litter free.

Credit: U.S. EPA



Continued from page 33

### **Putting it All Together: Quick Tips for Successful Event Recycling**

Follow these tips to create a successful waste reduction and recycling program at your next event:

- Get commitment from the top.
- Start slowly and build on success.
- Call your solid waste or public works department for information on recycling and composting programs in your area.
- Work behind the scenes with vendors before going public.
- Prevent waste in the first place by requesting that vendors use reusable containers instead of disposable items and serve condiments in bulk rather than single servings.
- Start with cardboard, beverage containers, and mixed paper.
- Set up recycling bins near trash cans. Ideally there should be one recycling bin per trash can.
- Enlist volunteers to monitor and empty bins.
- Keep signs and posters simple; avoid using logos or dates so signs can be reused at future events.
- “Close the loop” by buying recycling containers and other products made from recycled material.

Whatever type of special event you are organizing, you might be faced with recycling challenges. Remember: the financial, environmental, educational, and promotional rewards that you can derive from a thorough recycling plan are well worth the effort.

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