



Presents:

Zeroing in on Waste

Executive Summary

Problem

Waste audits of campus dumpsters and outdoor trash cans reveal that 85% of material currently going to landfill could be recycled or composted. According to campus waste audits, recyclable material makes up 27% of WWU dumpster content. Food scraps, food-soiled paper and compostable plastic make up 58%. Organic material that slowly decomposes in the landfill emits methane gas into the atmosphere, which is one of the leading GHG's associated with climate change. Landfill waste could be reduced to 15% of current levels, if recyclable and compostable materials were separated throughout the waste stream.

Solution

We propose to create a pilot zero waste zone in association with Dining Services in the back part of the Atrium which houses Topio's and Engrained. This will help decrease Westerns carbon footprint by removing recyclable/compostable material from the waste stream and encouraging the sale of only products with recyclable/compostable packaging.

Funding/Organization

Aramark, who funds campus dining, has agreed to absorb the costs of this project as part of their environmental stewardship and goal to Higher Education's National Commitment to Affect Positive Sustainable Changes.

Statement of Need

The project assists in addressing a global need to reduce GHG's, specifically methane emissions. This is achieved by preventing excess food material from emitting methane when improperly decomposed in landfills.

We have recognized a need to educate students and staff about zero waste and why it is important to Western as a school, as well as Bellingham as a community.

On a large scale, this project is important because as a learning institution we have the opportunity for trial and error, allowing others to capitalize on our successes. It is also not only important to WWU's goals of sustainability but can also dramatically cut costs of waste removal.

A zero waste zone will directly contribute to WWU's 10x12 program goal of a 10% reduction in utilities consumption and costs by 2012, as well as supporting the President's Climate Commitment and the WWU Climate Action Plan designed to coordinate campus utility reduction awareness and action.

Project description

Objective:

Reduce the amount of landfill waste produced from the back end of the Atrium, which houses *Topio's* and *Engrained*, to 5% of the current levels of diversion as demonstrated through waste audits by the end of the 2012 spring quarter.

Methods:

Product Replacement

As one of the leading ways in which to contribute to zero waste, all products the vendors serve food on or in, need to be compostable. Next to reducing overall usage, composting is the best way to dispose of waste. Any products that cannot be manufactured out of compostable materials are to be recyclable. The products need to be easily identifiable as to how they are disposed (compost or recycle) and there cannot be ANY landfill material used. According to our research there is a compostable option for almost everything these vendors use.

Public Education

User participation is essential for the success of this program. As a continuous goal of our project we will implement ways to make sorting waste as easy as possible. The first phase of this process which has already begun is a continuing effort to updating signage. New “3-D” sorting signs have already been put up in the Atrium which consist of large, color coded signs, with the actual products customers receive attached to them. With this in place it is as simple as matching the waste you have with the sign it is on you will know where to put it.

This is not enough however since one of the sorting stations can quickly become full or partially blocked by the line that can develop at Topio’s. There is a second sorting station inconveniently located in the far back corner by Engrained and we determined, by visual observation, that it is being underutilized. To avoid a costly remodeling project of moving the sorting station, we suggest signage be used to bring awareness to it and direct waste its direction.

Further educational signage can be used in the napkin containers that are on all of the tables and include information about what zero waste means and why it is important to WWU. In addition to the napkin inserts, signage should be implemented at the register where the food is purchased to begin educating the user before they are confronted with a waste sorting situation. Finally, a large sign or banner should be used to notify people that they are entering a zero waste area. This is important because it is one of the only effective ways we can try and keep outside waste, not distributed at the Atrium, from contaminating the sorting stations.

UC Davis converted their football stadium into a zero waste zone for game days. To help do this they had the employees tell customers at concessions that everything they were buying had compostable or recyclable wrapping. They also had the ability to block off openings to trash cans, since people were not allowed to bring in outside food to the stadium. Since there is no security or way to prevent people from bringing in outside trash in our area, blocking off trash cans is not a viable option. However, putting lids on the trash bins would make it harder to access them and help encourage people to sort their waste correctly, and possibly not dispose of outside trash here.

Before



After



Staff

As part of public education, the employees should inform customers that the products they are being handed are not garbage. To increase awareness, ease of use and repetition are important. Customers will be seeing the signs and being verbally told that they can compost and recycle before they are confronted with the decision of where waste goes at the sorting station. For these reasons employees will be educated on the scope of our project and how to dispose of the products they use. Employees will be briefed in pre-shift meetings by the manager of Topio's and Engrained to be sure they are fully educated on the current stock of products and to remind customers of zero waste.

Evaluation:

To determine the progress of the project and its continuing success, waste audits should be performed bi-quarterly. Employees who empty the sorting station bins into their larger waste containers will record the amount of bags being sorted into landfill, recycling, and composting and compare it to the amount after the project is under way.

Sustainability

This will be a pilot project to develop an efficiently operating zero waste zone which can then be easily implemented at the other eateries around campus. Once this project is carried out campus wide, WWU will be making a considerable difference in reducing the amount of material they send to the landfill.

To make sure this area stays a zero waste zone criteria for this area are as follows:

- Reduce landfill to 5% of waste stream
- Any new products must be compostable or recyclable
- Any new products must immediately be added to appropriate signs
- All employees must receive training on products and food waste reduction training
- If at any time a restaurant moves into this area that uses cooking oil the oil must be recycled as is done with other cooking oil on campus

We think the next location to adopt a zero waste policy should be the VU building. This is an area that is already making efforts towards zero waste and gets high volumes of traffic. For these reasons we feel it would be an easy transition into our zero waste model which would serve to educate more students about zero waste.

Budget/Organizations

WWU spends more than \$375,000 dollars per year for landfill waste disposal, in spite of the fact that the AS Recycle Center diverts over 850 tons of waste from landfill annually. With the implementation of our project we hope to decrease the amount of money WWU spends on landfill waste disposal and increase the amount of waste diverted.

As part of their sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, Aramark, who works in association with campus dining, has agreed to absorb all costs of this project from purchasing new products, signage, and properly educating their staff.

Becoming a Reality

This proposal outlines objectives and methods to qualify as a zero waste zone. Dining in the Atrium has not yet reached all of these goals but currently is in the final stages of converting to our zero waste model. We feel it is important to coordinate sign introduction with implementation of new products to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Completed:

- 3-D sorting signs
- “Did you know” informational signs
- New Pepsi products

Not Completed:

- Entrance/informational signs
- Display case
- Employee training
- Co-op plastic wrap from Engrained

Conclusion

By bringing the goal of sustainability that is already taking place in the Atrium full circle by introducing it as a zero waste zone, WWU is taking an important step forward in reducing its carbon footprint. Once our project takes hold we feel it will be met with positive attention from the media interested in what we are doing and bringing the employees of Aramark more of the attention they deserve. With the methods we've outlined, the Atrium can serve as a model for the other eateries around campus. With continuing participation from the school and Aramark, as well as ongoing public education, WWU can continue being one of the top environmentally friendly schools in the country.