



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

National Wildlife Federation

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Ashland University
America Recycles Day
Ashland, Ohio
(status of project, Spring 2001)

Campus Profile

Founded in 1878, Ashland University is a private, comprehensive university affiliated with the Brethren Church. Ashland University's 100-plus acre campus is located midway between Cleveland and Columbus in Northeast Ohio and features 35 modern buildings. Employees include 200 faculty members and 620 full-time staff. The University is home to over 1950 full-time undergraduate students. The University graduate programs include courses in Business and Education, as well as studies at the Ashland Theological Seminary.

Group/Class Profile

For America Recycles Day, Ashland University Recycling Program organized a Waste Audit with the assistance of student recyclers as well as Building Services, who helped with all aspects of the project. Other groups involved were: Residence Life, Ashland County Recycling Center, and AU Auxiliary Services. The offices helped through sponsorship and donation of food, T-shirts and pencils made from recycled currency.

Fortunately, Building Services played a key role in the preparation of the event by lining the garbage cans with clear liners the day of the waste audit, so all of the waste was visible, reducing the risk of injury. Several student recycling workers helped set up and tear down the event.

Project Goals and Summary

Many of the Building Services workers and the recyclers were verbal in their observance of recyclables ending up in the trash rather than in recycling. We were wondering just how much of the waste stream contained recyclables. So by conducting a waste audit our goal was to explore our garbage and learn what we could be doing better.

1. Identify how much of the waste stream from both academic and residential buildings was, in fact, recyclable.
2. Educate campus about recycling and clearly define what is recyclable.

Accomplishments

We learned that 70% of our waste stream was recyclable. It was quite amazing to turn the original 48 bags of waste into 37 bags of recycling and 4 bags of trash.

We succeeded in educating the Building Services workers with a very hands-on experience of what exactly can and cannot be recycled at the University. This process of weeding through bags of trash to expose recyclables was an important aspect of the learning process. By placing student recyclers amongst the sorters, they were able to answer questions and aid in the learning process of what can be recycled.

We did not succeed in educating many students. The only students that were drawn to the event were those of a sociology professor who brought one of his classes. This class learned more about the trash than they really wanted to that day, but it got the word out about what we can do to reduce the amount of material sent to the landfill.

Strategies and Steps Taken

Media — Two local papers wrote feature articles about the event. This caught a lot of attention from the outside community to come to the event. Unfortunately, the college paper was not interested in the story and had no involvement. This really hurt the event because we then relied on our own signs and flyers as well as word-of-mouth to draw attention to the event.

Teamwork with Building Services — The partnership between Building Services and the Recycling Program in this event was crucial to its success. The workers lined the garbage cans with clear liners so that the waste was viewable and therefore the risk of injury decreased. Also several workers volunteered to help with the sorting process. We gave the first five volunteers America Recycles Day T-shirts as a thank you.

Challenges and Responses

Lack of support from the student body:

1. Getting the campus paper to pick up the story;
2. Getting the attention and interest of the students;
3. Students were concerned that we were going through the trash. Students commented that people often throw things away because they do not want them collected for recycling. (Private info, grades, credit card and bank statements).

The lack of support from the students was a real disappointment. In our situation it was quite a reversal, the adults on campus and in the community were interested, grossed out, and curious about the event. The students seemed not to notice the event, even though we had lots of posters around campus and student recyclers involved. We even had a judicial student who had to serve community service hours help us, and he had a grand time.

Funding Sources

- Ashland County Recycling Center donated America Recycles T-shirts, and pencils made from recycled currency. We have a great working relationship with our SWD and this support was a tremendous boost to our event.
- Residence Life donated 10 pizzas.
- Auxiliary Services donated apples, cookies and hot apple cider. I tried to stick with a fall theme.

Publicity and Media

In Mansfield and Ashland, the two local papers wrote previews about the event. These articles really helped to get the word out about our project.

The Recycling Program hung signs all over campus. The most effective method used to target the students was by filming a little infomercial on the campus TV station about the event. This was very effective. I found a lot of students telling me they saw it.

Documentation

Several news articles were published in the local newspaper. These are on file with Campus Ecology.

Key Groups/Allies Involved

Peggy Kohler, Supervisor of Building Services, was most supportive. She not only helped with the planning process, but she also motivated her employees to join in the fun and help sort the trash. It was a win/win situation. The extra hands made the day go quickly and the employees learned more about the recycling process.

The Recycling Employees were also excellent in setting up and tearing down the event and perhaps more importantly, in sharing their knowledge about recycling with the community.

Next Year's Plans

We would like to continue the event, but need to plan better on gaining the students' support and interest. The fall semester will be used as a time to increase visibility of the Recycling Program, building up to another waste audit and educational event about recycling during the week of America Recycles Day. The goals for this event are to experience an increase in recycling numbers and a decrease in landfill figures, as well as to continue our efforts to increase education on campus about recycling.

Contacts

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