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King County's Marymoor Park Turns Up The Volume on Recycling

Marymoor Park in Redmond, Washington, has launched an innovative recycling program at its summer concert series. About half the waste produced by vendors and concertgoers was recycled in 2007, and organizers are shooting for 75 percent for 2008. Marymoor officials are confident they can hit their mark by improving signage, mandating some compostable materials, and attracting a few more well-trained volunteers.

Photo: DNRP



Marymoor Park averages 15 concerts every summer, attracting enthusiastic crowds such as this one.

Program Overview

Marymoor Park is a popular venue among residents of King County. In fact, with some 3 million visitors annually, the 640-acre park in Redmond is the most visited site in the county's park system. Marymoor became even more popular in 2007 when the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) and radio station KMTT partnered to transform the Marymoor Summer Concert Series into a carbon-neutral event. In 2007 the series featured bands UB40, Wilco, 311, and comedian Brian Regan, as well as other nationally known performers.

An average of 15 concerts are held here every year, June through mid-September. The concert venue has a seating capacity of 5,000, and average attendance for each show is about 3,000. Mainly because food and beverages are sold at the concerts and visitors are encouraged to bring picnic food, a significant amount of waste is created. In addition, large company meetings, community festivals, and church picnics are held on the venue



grounds—up to five per year with 2,000–5,000 attendees each—generating many empty cans, bottles, and other recyclables.

Clearly there was a recycling opportunity at Marymoor. Radio station KMTT got the ball rolling when it decided to promote the concert series as carbon-neutral (achieving a net release of zero carbon dioxide emissions). The county ultimately initiated the recycling program in 2007 as part of the carbon-neutral theme.

DNRP's Solid Waste Division hired Wilder Environmental Consulting to set up the program. Waste Management, a private waste hauler, already provided local recycling and food waste composting services to Redmond-area residents and merchants, and it was easily contracted to provide the receptacles and hauling services. Local business Cedar Grove Composting accepts the organic materials and composts them.

Consensus for a cost-effective program was achieved through close cooperation of all stakeholders. DNRP leaders, with full support from King County Executive Ron Sims, met with KMTT to develop the carbon-neutral concert series. KMTT promoted the concerts and highlighted the recycling program through radio announcements and its Web site in 2007.

Premier Properties, the food vendor coordinator, also plays a role. The company manages the Clise Mansion at Marymoor Park, which hosts the hospitality area. In 2007, Premier Properties encouraged vendors to participate in the program, and in 2008, participation is strong. Vendors are requested to use food service items such as plates, utensils, and cups made from compostable materials that are accepted by the local composting company. Vendors also recycle onsite.

Nuts and Bolts

Marymoor's recycling program accepts plastic bottles, aluminum cans, glass, and food waste. Vendors are responsible for recycling in concession areas, while concert attendees and visitors are encouraged to recycle in the venue and parking areas (only bottles and cans in the latter). Park employees are responsible for recycling bottles, cans, and paper in administrative areas.

Equipment and Infrastructure. Marymoor Park orders twenty-four 96-gallon compost totes and fifteen 96-gallon recycling totes to have on hand for the recycling program. Three recycling stations are set up within the venue. Staff members empty the blue recycling totes into six 2-yard containers, while compost totes are left in a designated area for Waste Management to handle the next business day.

Aside from the recycling and composting bins, Marymoor has no recycling equipment or infrastructure onsite. Receptacles are stored and serviced by the waste hauler in an open area behind the concert venue and near the food vendors. This area is approximately



Photo: DNRP

MRC volunteers Rina Fa'amoe and Valerie Garza organize a recycling station before the crowd arrives at a concert.

50 feet square, and large trucks can access it through a paved driveway with a turnaround space.

Staffing. Staffing for the Marymoor recycling program comes from all corners: DNRP staff members collect some material, food vendors collect material in the concession area, and volunteers collect most of the materials generated by the guests. During and after concerts, park staffers and volunteers pick up litter and pull full bags of garbage out of cans and re-line them. If the litter is identifiable as recyclable, it is placed in the proper bin.

After being trained by the recycling program consultant, most vendors now use recyclable and compostable food service items and place food scraps and compostables in the containers provided. Vendors also recycle cardboard, plastic, aluminum, and glass.

To help collect the recyclables, DNRP enlists the services of volunteers through the King County Master Recycler Composter (MRC) program and from the public. As part of its commitment to reducing waste generated in the region, King County runs the MRC program as one way to educate residents about waste reduction and recycling. Open to county residents, the program provides 40 hours of free training on the subjects of waste prevention, recycling, and home composting.

Volunteers are trained onsite through a simple orientation to Marymoor and its particular program and processes. The volunteer recyclers then are stationed at various points around the venue to oversee use of the three types of receptacles: for composting, recyclables, and garbage. The volunteers assist park patrons in identifying the proper receptacles for the waste they are disposing, answer questions about recycling and composting, and assist with cleanup during and after the concerts.

Collection Process. Ideally, a work shift consists of four volunteers, and shifts last three hours. There are two to three shifts per concert, depending on its length. Collection is done both during and after a concert. The bags of recyclables are moved in totes, which are corralled for pickup behind the concert venue. The waste hauler empties the carts and containers and delivers the organic materials to the Cedar Grove Composting site. The noncompostable materials are taken elsewhere for recycling.

Educational Efforts/Public Outreach. Marymoor informs park guests and concertgoers about the recycling program through radio spots, newspaper articles, Web sites, and onsite signage. KMTT features articles on its Web site, as do all the King



Photo: DNRP

A volunteer, left, explains to a guest that his beer cup is compostable. Signs hung above bins help visitors locate recycling stations.



Photo: DNRP

Volunteer Rina Fa'amoe checks to make sure an item is compostable before putting it in the appropriate bin.

County divisions involved in the program. The newspaper and Web news articles proved the most effective of all the approaches, according to DNRP official Norah Gaynor, mainly because the articles were prominently placed and long enough to tell the whole story of the recycling program.

Costs and Benefits

DNRP evaluates the recycling program's results by reviewing the volumes collected and assessing volunteer suggestions and comments, staff input, and public and media response. DNRP staffers determine the amount of material collected by counting the containers and visually estimating the volumes. Results for 2007 show that Marymoor reduced the amount of waste taken to the landfill from its concert series by 50 percent over previous years.

The costs incurred for setting up and maintaining the program include DNRP staff time of about 200 hours, recycling and composting bin rental and servicing, and signage. Marymoor rents the 96-gallon totes and 2-yard containers. All receptacles are serviced after each event at an additional cost. Volunteer recruitment also incurs some costs.

For signage, Marymoor produced its materials in house using a color printer, and laminated 50 signs. The park would have preferred more professional signs, and future costs in this area remain to be determined as Marymoor explores that option and considers more and different signs. The recycling service charges increased the total expenditure for waste disposal for the concert season. (The park does not receive payment for any of the recyclables, nor does it currently have commercial sponsorship, such as from product distributors or beverage companies, to help fund the program.)

Gaynor says the program is a success because of the number of people DNRP reaches with its recycling message—in person and via the media. “Recycling and the environment are strongly embraced values among many people in King County,” she says. “The conscientious staff and volunteers want to increase the numbers just for the sake of more and better recycling.”

The department received positive comments from guests at the concerts and several favorable news articles in the print, radio, and online press. Some 40,000 concertgoers were exposed to public place recycling and had the opportunity to interact with local, trained recycling volunteers.

Credit: DNRP



This “Food Compost” sign directs concertgoers to the correct bin for their uneaten food, compostable cups and plates, and related items.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge: The recycling rate—50 percent in 2007—is successful, but Marymoor hopes to do even better.

Solution: The park will increase staffing after concerts to sort litter picked up after guests leave the venue, improve signage at recycling stations and at the venue entrance, make informational announcements before shows and during breaks on the public address system, provide better lighting at recycling stations for late evening shows, and monitor vendor recycling more during shows.

Challenge: Concertgoers, staff, and volunteers had difficulty distinguishing collected materials. Cups, plates, and other items were made from a corn-based material and should have been collected for composting, but much of it was placed in the recycling or trash bins.

Solution: Marymoor will encourage vendors to increase use of food service items such as plates, utensils, and cups made from compostable materials that are accepted by the local composting company. Also, Marymoor will continue to educate concertgoers to place compostable materials in the appropriate bins.

Challenge: Providing ample staff and volunteers during and after shows is a challenge.

Solution: Marymoor plans to embark on an incentive program to gain more help. This could involve offering free concert admission in exchange for volunteer service. Most new volunteers are not expected to come with MRC training. Instead, the park hopes to increase volunteer recruitment through more public outreach efforts.

In the Future

Marymoor set an ambitious goal of recycling 75 percent of all materials in 2008, up from 50 percent in 2007. Because the venue hosts many ethnically themed events, Marymoor plans to have language-specific signage when appropriate. Also, universal signage, using graphics rather than words, might be helpful, organizers believe. “With signs, you really need to know your audience,” says Gaynor.

The recycling program also could use more volunteers, Gaynor says, though this should not be that great an obstacle. The concert performers typically are well known, and by offering free admission, Marymoor should be able to attract more help, she says.

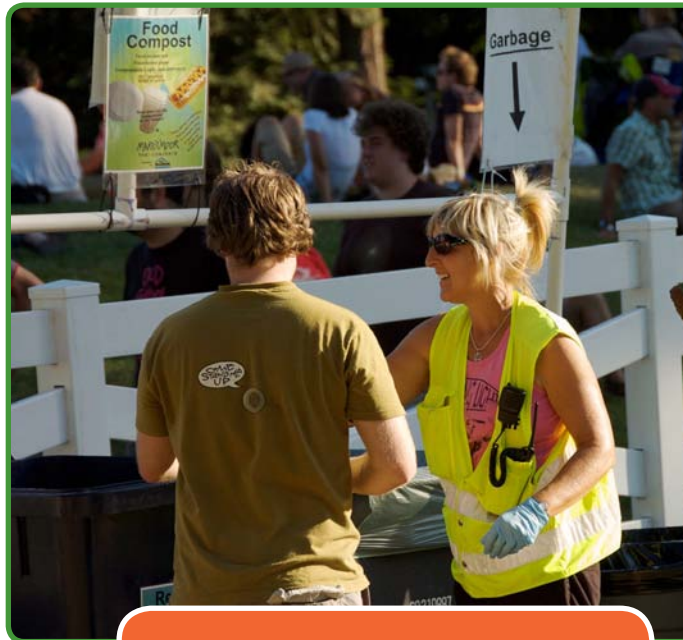


Photo: DNR/P

Marymoor Park employee Sheree Rosenlund (right) helps a concertgoer choose the correct recycling bin.

Facts at a Glance

- 15 concerts are held every year, with average attendance of 3,000.
- 40,000 concertgoers were exposed to messages about recycling and composting in 2007.
- More than 100 cubic yards of waste was diverted from landfills in 2007.
- Marymoor aims to achieve a 75 percent recycling rate in 2008.

Reasons for Success

Gaynor attributes Marymoor's recycling success to the sheer number of people reached with the recycling message through the concert series and associated media outreach. Those efforts build on the strong environmental consciousness of King County residents and have cut the amount of waste going to landfills from the concert venue by at least 50 percent, she says.

More Information

For more information, visit Marymoor Park's Web site at www.metrokc.gov/parks/marymoor or contact Norah Gaynor, program manager at Marymoor Park, at 206-296-0673 or Norah.Gaynor@kingcounty.gov.



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