



Greening the Canadian National Exhibition

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On a scale of green, the Canadian National Exhibition is one of the greenest, according to the head of operations for the nations fair Virginia Ludy.

"We are leaps and bounds ahead of a lot of fairs," Ludy said, "however that is not to say we should be sitting on our laurels. We have to continue getting better."

In fact, the fair is getting so green, it is time to test it against the standard.

EcoLogo, North America's largest third-party environmental standard and certification mark which was founded in 1988 by the Government of Canada, is performing an audit on the CNE this year to make sure it meets its mandate.

"If we are going to go around talking about the great stuff we are doing, we need to test ourselves against the standard," Ludy said, adding with all the greening initiatives found at the fair, her bet is they will meet and exceed the standard.

New this year is an organic waste recycling program throughout the grounds. Last year, organic waste was recycled in the Food Building, Direct Energy Centre and RibFest areas only.



Green CNE. Head of operations for the Canadian National Exhibition, Virginia Ludy, shows off the first solar powered game at the national fair. It is just one of a number of greening initiatives happening this year at the CNE. (August 25, 2010) Staff photo/ERIN HATFIELD

"We have done organics before with our exhibitors in the Food Building and with our concessionaires outdoors, but now we are starting to spread the organics into public areas," Ludy said. "This year we have spread the organics across the grounds."

Ludy said the diversion rate is currently at 77.3 per cent and the goal is to see the rates continue to increase until one day they reach 100 per cent diversion from landfill.

"I think we are very fortunate that we live in the City of Toronto where recycling has really become like habit for most of us...we are very fortunate that our audience has been educated."

All styrofoam has been eliminated on the grounds at the 2010 fair, and food vendors are all using compostable plates, cups and cutlery.

"There are four sorting stations on site where concessionaires take their stuff and we separate it out. There are three at the end of the midway and one over by the (Direct Energy Centre) and in those stations there are big compactors for cardboard, bottles and cans, and for organics."

A company called Planet Earth takes the organics; a poultry farm takes all of the grease to be used as a feed enhancement; a farmer reuses all the manure from the horse barn; and the recyclables are separated taken to be recycled.

She said there are no beer bottles on site during the CNE. All beer is served in cans thereby minimizing the need for plastic cups, and the cups that are used in beer service will be made of compostable materials.

According to CNE staff, the overall number of cups used is expected to decrease by more than 50 per cent this year.

In addition to source separation of waste, there are many more greening initiatives at the CNE. Ten water stations have been set up throughout the CNE grounds where visitors can refill their own water bottles with City of Toronto tap water.

Food concessionaires and Food Building exhibitors are being encouraged to buy locally grown food products.

"We signed a declaration with Local Foods Plus and we are going to be working with our exhibitors over the winter months to encourage them to use supplies from farmers who have that designation with the Local Food Plus group."

"Kilowatt Cops" are on patrol the grounds to ensure that energy is not being wasted as the CNE attempts to tame the bright lights of the fair and conserve energy.

"We have an energy conservation program where we don't allow lights to be turned on on the marquees until dusk, we turn the escalators off in the buildings during non-show hours," she explained, adding lights and air-conditioning are lowered during off hours.

According to CNE staff, the kilowatt consumption of energy has dropped by more than 800,000 kW since 2005.

"We are encouraging our exhibitors to use low-wattage light bulbs or LED bulbs where they can."

There are four sorting stations on site with solar-powered compactors and a new solar power Duck Pond building.

Ludy said the people who run the CNE are always looking for other green initiatives and opportunities to improve what they do at the CNE by travelling to other fairs and seeing what is done elsewhere, and in the future the CNE is looking at a water conservation program.

"I know that water isn't a big issue in Toronto right now, but in talking with other fairs across the United States and in Canada, particularly in the west, water conservation is huge, because they have huge water shortages."

The greening doesn't stop within the confines of the grounds. According to Ludy, the CNE works with other fair managers, helping them to improve their operations. A group of managers of GTA fairs were at the CNE Aug. 25 to tour the waste diversion and recycling facilities on site.

"We believe part of our responsibility in being a leader and being the National Exhibition, we need to not only have a good solid program here, but we need to be an advocate to other fairs in our industry and help bring them along so that they too can be responsible environmental patrons."