

“Going Green!” Part I: Sustainability in Sports

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Increasing energy costs and substantial deficits in the U.S. economy underscore a growing need to reexamine the way sports do business in our society. Establishing a balance between energy consumption and utilization of clean renewable energy needs

to become more prevalent. Beyond energy conservation efforts, reducing the overall amount of waste generated through recycling and composting needs to become a substantial part of efforts to maintain economic viability and sustainability. As with all industry, sports business entities need to adopt more socially responsible behaviors

by shifting to a more conservation-based outlook, particularly with regard to natural resources. The purpose of this report is to discuss sustainability, offer examples of ongoing sustainability initiatives in sports, and provide resources to athletic trainers and therapists who are interested in encouraging better stewardship within athletic departments.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability efforts do not require a sacrifice of convenience for more socially responsible behaviors. Sustainability efforts are about

creative utilization of all of resources under the right circumstances. In general terms, *sustainability* is the capacity to maintain processes, functions, diversity, and productivity over time. For the purpose of this report, sustainability is defined as a philosophy that promotes habitual behaviors that help create a vibrant economy and an optimal quality of life, while respecting the need to sustain natural resources and to protect the environment, so that future generations might live in a world that the present generation has enjoyed but not diminished.¹

Athletic trainers and therapists should encourage athletic departments to consider creating a sustainability committee for the purpose of establishing an Environmental Management System (EMS). An EMS supports a long-range plan that measures environmental program goals and effectiveness, based on “the world’s environmental management standards” set forth by standard number 14,001 of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO; www.iso.org). The EMS plan centers around four key elements: (a) improved and enhanced environmental performance, (b) pollution prevention and resource conservation, (c) increased efficiency and cost reduction, and (d) employee/customer awareness of environmental issues and responsibilities.

The main objective of the sustainability committee should be to establish policies that encourage sustainable practices and create innovative projects and programs, which work together to accomplish goals of the plan. Although many sustainable ini-

KEY POINTS

▶ Regardless of how big or small, sustainable programs can make a measurable impact on the environment.

▶ Sustainability is about creatively applying all resources under the appropriate circumstances.

▶ A paradigm shift is needed away from consumption toward conservation and athletic trainers can help lead the way.

tatives might require substantial investment in new technology or the purchase of carbon off-set credits, it is important to note that every effort, regardless of how big or small, will make a measurable impact on the environment. Any effort that raises awareness and encourages collaboration at a relatively small expense is a success. No single idea or goal will be appropriate for every school, university, or business. More than 600 university presidents have signed the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, pledging their efforts to reduce greenhouse emissions. To find the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, and to determine whether or not your institution is on the list, visit <http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org>.

What Can Athletic Trainers and Therapists Do to Help "Go Green"

There are three things that athletic trainers and therapists can do to promote an organization's commitment to going green: Research what other schools are doing, initiate a sustainable project, and be an advocate who leads by example.

Research What Other Schools Are Doing

In 1970, the University of Colorado at Boulder was one of the first institutions to initiate a green campus. They created a student-led Environmental Center (<http://ecenter.colorado.edu/>) before the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created. It is currently the largest student-run environment center of its kind. The center's mission is to provide information on environmental issues to students, faculty, staff, and the community. The Buffalo's were the first BCS Football team to host Zero-Waste athletic events, creating a massive recycle and composting program called "Ralphie's Green Stampede" (Figure 1). The university was able to divert over 40 tons of recyclables and compost from landfills, which included food waste. As a result, they were able to reuse, recycle, or compost 80% of all materials generated during football games by implementing policies and promoting creative programs to achieve balance in waste and energy production. Students even created a Free Bike Valet service as an incentive to encourage people to ride bikes rather than drive cars to the games.²

In October of 2008, the University of Wisconsin homecoming game against Illinois was the first Big

Ten football game played under carbon-neutral conditions. An undergraduate student, supervised by two faculty members, calculated the projected carbon footprint of the game (1,170 tons) by using a formula that considered transportation of the teams and fans, and energy usage during the game. The carbon footprint of the game was primarily offset by investing in the Delta Institute Carbon Offset Program and by purchasing clean energy credits from the Chicago Climate Exchange. The athletic department collaborated with the university's Agriculture Department, state agencies, and local farmers to host a summit focused on carbon sequestering. This effort culminated with the conversion of a 220-acre Wisconsin farm into a Managed Forest Law (MFL) certified forest, located just outside of Madison. The newly planted forest includes sixteen acres of oak and walnut trees that will be left untouched until full maturity at 60 to 80 years. To ensure that carbon sequestering benefits will be maintained, the property is certified under America's oldest and largest tree conservation program, which includes specific rules to maintain healthy forests and stipulations that when trees must be replaced when harvested. University of Wisconsin Associate Athletic Director Vince Sweeney said, "It's important for us to be environmentally conscious in what we do and to spread the word about how everyday actions can lead to a cleaner environment."

University of Wisconsin Wear Red—Think Green Campaign (Figure 2) was a grassroots initiative started by an athletic department that spells out recent and ongoing sustainability initiatives, including recycling efforts and educational information in game-day media. This campaign identifies short-term and long-term initiatives for the UW Athletic Department that



Figure 1 Colorado leads the way hosting zero-waste football games.