



EUGENE: a Sustainable Sports Leader

Oregon city has made going
green an art form



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Introduction

Sporting events can be beneficial to communities in countless ways.

They can raise a host city's profile on a local, regional, national or worldwide level; they can spark improvements in infrastructure and transportation; and they can create jobs and provide an economic jolt.

One downside to hosting sports competitions, though, is they generate enormous quantities of waste. Sports events can easily become unnecessarily wasteful and misaligned with broader societal momentum toward addressing climate change and restoration of the environment.

The waste created at sport events is a symptom of the current "throwaway" society, a paradigm that occurred largely after World War II and the advent of consumerism. According to a report from SaveOnEnergy, the average American is responsible for producing 4.4 pounds of garbage per day, which is roughly 728,000 tons of daily trash, enough to fill 63,000 garbage trucks. That number increases significantly when sports are involved. In the United States alone, more than 140 million people per year attend events for the five largest professional leagues (Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League, National Hockey League and Major League Soccer), which means almost half the country's population is attending games and leaving behind colossal amounts of garbage as they consume food and beverages in disposable packaging while attending those events. Extrapolate these statistics over a lifetime and considering the United States makes up only 4.4 percent of the world's population, a realization hits with the ferocity of an Oregon linebacker: human beings are producing an astronomical amount of trash.

Each day, humans add more than 90 million tons of global warming air pollution into the atmosphere and Americans throw away more than 25 percent of the food they grow annually. According to Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, an estimated 70-plus species per day go extinct due to habitat destruction stemming from wasteful human behavior. Clearly, human consumption and waste are harmful for the Earth. And given that a study by the Marist Institute for Public Opinion discovered more than 61 percent of Americans identify as sports fans while only 13 percent say they follow science, making sports greener while also raising the environmental awareness of those who attend these games is important to a societal transformation toward a more sustainable present and future.

Leading the way in green events

The city of Eugene, Oregon, is at the forefront of the green movement, having established itself as a town that embraces innovation, forward thinking and a commitment to sustainability.

Eugene has become a nationwide leader in developing sustainable events

Eugene has adopted several sustainability goals, including reducing community-wide fossil fuel consumption 50 percent by 2030; reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions 10 percent below 1990 levels by 2020; reducing greenhouse gas emissions so all city facilities are carbon neutral by 2020; and reducing waste from city facilities and operations 90 percent by 2020.

On the sporting side of the ledger, Eugene has become a nationwide leader in developing sustainable events, thanks in part to the efforts of organizations like the Eugene Cascades and Coast Sports Commission, the Council for Responsible Sport and the city itself.



“Eugene utilizes our community’s commitment to sustainability to support a culture and awareness of sustainability,” said Deveron Musgrave, Waste Prevention and Green Building program coordinator for the City of Eugene. “Working with event organizers that prioritize responsible event production serves to lower the impacts of locally hosted events while creating a legacy of sustainably produced events. This work has informed our efforts to forge a useful framework for event management that can support events that make Eugene their destination as well as being shared with other municipalities that want to reduce the impacts of events in their communities.”

The Council of Responsible Sport(Council)

An organization that was founded in Portland in 2008 then relocated to Eugene in 2014, with the goal of making sports events more socially and environmentally sound.

In 2005, Eugene officials noticed the city was producing more than 110,000 tons of waste annually. In an effort to curb that number, they developed the City of Eugene’s Sustainable Sports Initiative, which utilizes the **Council** for Responsible Sport’s event certification standard to address environmental and economic prosperity challenges.



The Council supports event organizers who strive to produce socially and environmentally responsible competitions through coaching and a set of templates and tools to help organizers improve and track their performance on specific aspects of their events. Its primary function is to certify responsible event production practices according to a set of industry best practice standards and celebrate competitions that have become certified. Certification formally recognizes the successful production of a socially and environmentally responsible sporting event. The Council is the only U.S.-based, third-party certifier for sustainable sports.

In 2014, the Eugene, Cascades & Coast worked with the Council to become the first Sports Commission/CVB in the nation to offer a downloadable guide to help planners produce more environmentally friendly and socially conscious sports events.

“Even when people have the desire to make their event environmentally-friendly, sometimes the knowledge is lacking or planners don’t even know where to start,” said Janis Ross, Eugene, Cascades & Coast executive director. “Sports events produce tremendous amounts of waste, but we can make a big impact with small gestures listed in the guide.”



Eugene's efforts to promote sustainable sports have paid off, as the city has hosted 10 certified events since 2012. The certified competitions include the United States Olympic Track and Field Trials (2012, 2016); The Big O Roller Derby Tournament (2013-14); University of Oregon track and field events (2013-14); NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships (2013--16); the International Association of Athletics Federations World Junior Track and Field Championships (2014); the United States Track and Field (USATF) Outdoor Championships (2015); the University of Oregon vs. Oregon State Civil War football game (2015-16); and the Eugene Marathon (2016-17).



"The city of Eugene has the most certified events of any city in the world," said Shelley Villalobos, managing director for the Council for Responsible Sport. "Organizers in Eugene have operationalized sustainability in such a way that it is fundamentally incorporated into the way they plan events. They don't have to think about it as a thing they throw in or add on, it is the way they do things."

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The University of Oregon shares that line of thinking. The college has a policy requiring all new campus buildings to attain LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification and aims to produce events that have far-reaching social benefits with the smallest possible environmental impact. The biggest of those events is the university's annual Civil War game against rival Oregon State University. The 2015 edition of that contest attracted a sellout crowd of 55,000 and was the first college football game to earn certification from the Council.



"The 2012 Olympic Trials' 'Rethink Waste' activation diverted over 18 tons of material to compost and had a 78 percent waste recovery rate for the event," Ross said. "But the big win is that in just over two years the city's commercial compost program has diverted over 3,600 tons of organic material to compost production through the 159 participating businesses.

" One way to determine the sustainability of an event is through its waste diversion rate, which is a method of tabulating the amount of waste diverted from landfills. According to Musgrave, Eugene's waste diversion rates for events has been superb. At the 2016 Olympic Track and Field trials, the rate was a robust 63 percent, while the 2014 IAAF World Junior Track and Field Championships posted a 57 percent rate. The 2015 USATF Track and Field Outdoor Championships (46.28 percent), 2016 Eugene Marathon (40.6 percent) and 2015 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships (40.52 percent) were also highly sustainable.

“At many recent events that have worked to reduce waste, there has been a continuing evolution in how this reduction of event waste is accomplished. Partnerships with reuse nonprofits, for example, allow events to donate large volumes of difficult to recycle material that then is reused in a variety of applications,” Musgrave said. “This type of strategy has not only significantly reduced event waste, it is arguably an even more green strategy than recycling, and effectively diverts very large volumes of material from the landfill. At the 2016 Olympic Track and Field Trials, 63 percent of post-event material was diverted through donation to reuse organizations, and much of the seating materials that could have been built in place were rented instead — which isn’t included in the diversion rate yet had a significant impact on reducing post-event waste.”



Beneficial to the planet, and humans alike

Eugene's successful approach to hosting sustainable competitions can be partially attributed to the city's grass-roots efforts in motivating its community to living greener lifestyles. With many of its residents adhering to sustainable behavior, tournament planners have less of an uphill climb when it comes to convincing sports goers to recycle their bottles as opposed to tossing them in a bush.

"Events are a nice place to join in the broader sustainable efforts of the city," Villalobos said. "For example, encouraging public transportation use, so people become more familiar with using it, don't have to worry about parking and might consider making it a more regular habit if they have a good experience."

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At the 2014 World Junior Championships, Eugene enabled those with a championships ticket to use public transportation for free. At the 2015 NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships and the 2015 USATF Outdoor Championships, TrackTown USA, a nonprofit organization that hosted the events, offered multiple water refill stations in the athlete, media and spectator areas. TrackTown USA also offered a free bicycle valet service, encouraging visitors to travel with a lighter carbon footprint and reduce parking congestion.



“During the 2016 Olympic Track and Field Trials, the event organizer, TrackTown USA, created a sensory experience for a vision-impaired attendee so that he and his family could fully enjoy the event,” Musgrave said. “At many of the track and field events hosted in Eugene, TrackTown has supported a ticket donation program that provides tickets to families that might otherwise not be able to attend. These are just a few examples of how a sustainable event can engage with a host community beyond simply implementing recycling and food waste collection, and we see more and more event producers are taking bold steps to invest in not just the environment but in communicating their values and providing examples of social leadership.”

A bright future

Eugene has won multiple green awards, including the Sport and Environment Award by the U.S. Olympic Committee in 2008, being ranked among the top five green cities in America by Mother Nature Network in 2011, and earning Waste Recycling and News' Green City Award in 2013.

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Perhaps the biggest testament to Eugene's sustainability is its designation as the host city for the International Association of Athletic Federation's 2021 World Track and Field Championships, the first time the event will be held in the United States. With nearly 2,000 participants representing as many as 214 countries, the championships are the largest sporting event in the world and will pose a sizable challenge to Eugene's waste reduction efforts.



"Eugene takes great pride in all of the events, large or small, that choose to make our city their destination," Musgrave said. "Two recent examples of responsibly-produced events stand out: the 2016 Olympic Track and Field Trials, and the Eugene Marathon. Both of these events are emblematic of what can be achieved when event producers prioritize sustainability. The city is committed to working with and supporting the Local Organizing Committee, and ensuring that our community has an infrastructure in place that can support a sustainable event of this scale."

A CALL TO ACTION





A call to action

Eugene has established a template for hosting sustainable events. The question is, what can other communities do to follow its lead?

According to Musgrave, that answer is merely a mouse click away.

“Resources for developing a sustainable events program are often made available through similar programs in communities that have existing models,” Musgrave said. “As an example, one of the resources that Eugene currently has to offer to other communities is a handbook outlining our development of the City of Eugene’s We Can! Sustainable Events program. This downloadable PDF is available to anyone that wants to access it through our city webpages: www.eugene-or.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/29089, and can be used as a resource to build similar programs in other municipalities. There are also a variety of free tools available on our webpages that may be of use to another community looking to build a sustainable event friendly infrastructure: www.eugene-or.gov/2755/Sustainable-Event-Resources including an online sustainability reporting tool and a travel emissions calculator.”

Sunny Arthurs, director of The Big O Tournament, says a diligent and persistent approach is needed in the quest for sustainability.

"We worked with our city to develop a working document that serves as a checklist for folks in event production seeking to become a sustainable event," Arthurs said. "The city of Eugene now has a sustainable event certification process that we piloted. We started with identifying all areas that could change

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and then figured out how to change them year by year. Money is often a barrier so each year we work to get closer to truly being socially, economically and environmentally sustainable."

Villalobos suggests event organizers reach out to the Council for Responsible Sport and request access to its free "Where We Stand"

assessment tool, which shows how can help identify areas for improvement.

"Connect and discuss," Villalobos said. "There are many ways to do this, but one good way to get started is to convene a meeting, inviting representatives from (A) the event host organization, (B) the local CVB, (C) the city government (sustainability and the mayor's office or solid waste are good starting points), and (D) major event sponsors and service providers from the private sector.

"(Event holders should also) discuss the challenges and opportunities of shared responsibility when it comes to finding ways to make events more impactful, more sustainable, better attended/supported locally and less wasteful," Villalobos added. "Make a plan. Gather what you know. Identify what you know you could do better at and consider what resources exist that could help fill the gap."