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## Game plans increase recycling at large-event venues

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Recycling has become so ingrained in the Puget Sound area that many of us take it personally if we can't recycle everywhere we go.

Responding to this public demand, most large events and venues in the Seattle area now provide recycling collection. But event recycling is a whole different ballgame; it's not like recycling at home.

**Q:** When I go to a big sporting event or concert, I often have trouble finding recycling bins. Why is that?

**A:** The bane of any recycling program is "contamination," the industry term for garbage mixed in with the recycling. Contamination makes processing more difficult and expensive, and can decrease the value of recyclables.

At a crowded festival or sports event, garbage often gets inadvertently tossed into recycling bins. Various strategies are used to keep contamination under control at events, such as limiting the number of recycling bins or the materials collected, using specially designed bins, and posting volunteer monitors at recycling stations.

**Q:** Can event recycling still succeed when eventgoers have only limited opportunities to recycle?

**A:** Yes, because much of the recycling at a large event goes on behind the scenes. Event organizers work directly with food vendors to collect their recyclables and often their food waste for composting. After an event, "pickers" fan out through the seats or festival grounds to round up all the garbage left behind. Some local stadiums and events now have their pickers separate that waste and recycle as much as possible.

**Q:** What's the latest scoop on local event recycling?

**A:** The collection of food scraps and other food-soiled compostables directly from eventgoers, unheard of in most of the U.S., has started to take root here. This material goes to Cedar Grove Composting, where it's combined with yard waste and turned into a compost product sold at area stores.

In another example of local innovation, a new city ordinance taking effect in Seattle next July will require all food-service operations, including those at events, to use fully compostable or recyclable cups, plates and utensils. This will likely result in even more recycling and composting collection for the public at events, though there will be some confusion at first.

**Q:** How about a quick event recycling tour?

**A:** OK, let's make a swing around four events and venues many of us will visit this year:

**Safeco Field.** Mariners fans can recycle plastic beverage bottles at about 200 distinctive bottle-shaped collection bins. Five new bins collect food scraps and other compostables from the public, though that effort is still being developed. Recycling rate (the percentage of waste recycled or composted) for 2009: 40 percent.

**Bumbershoot.** This year the huge Labor Day weekend music and arts festival at Seattle Center will introduce 10 public collection stations for food scraps and compostables, each staffed by a new volunteer "Green Team." The festival also encourages visitors to

bring reusable water bottles by providing several high-volume water refilling stations. Recycling rate for 2008: 20 percent.

**Marymoor Park concerts.** Featuring well-known acts from Keb' Mo' to the Pretenders, the summer concert series at this King County park in Redmond pioneered volunteer-monitored collection of compostable items and food scraps from the public. Recycling rate for 2009: 49 percent.

**Qwest Field.** Home to the Seahawks, Sounders and legions of rowdy fans, Qwest Field has installed 500 bins on the concourses where those fans can recycle bottles, aluminum and certain plastic cups. Recycling rate for 2008: 34 percent.

**Q:** I'm inspired now, and we have a community event coming up for 100 people. Would event recycling work for us?

**A:** Definitely. In fact, a 2007 Washington state law requires recycling of beverage containers at events. The state Department of Ecology offers info on the law and additional resources at [www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/eventrecycling](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/eventrecycling). Waste happens everywhere, especially at events, so why leave recycling at home?

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