

## Columnists

---

Originally published Friday, April 6, 2012 at 6:05 PM

### **Sports stadiums blossom into sustainability champs**

Just a few years ago, sports stadiums were arguably the least green places on the planet. Now many stadiums have become models of sustainability...

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Just a few years ago, sports stadiums were arguably the least green places on the planet. Now many stadiums have become models of sustainability, especially in our region.

Today we'll explore that turnaround by taking a closer look at some fields of sustainable dreams. Since baseball season is just getting under way, we'll start with the Seattle Mariners' green haven, Safeco Field.

**Q:** Before we open the roof on Safeco, why does it matter if stadiums go green?

**A:** Sports venues host hundreds of thousands of guests every year. Immense amounts of resources are needed to build and operate those stadiums, feed the fans and get the fans to and from the games.

Teams and stadium operators know that many fans, not to mention local governments and environmentalists, appreciate any steps they can take to reduce the environmental impact of their buildings. Seattle-area stadium goers also like being able to recycle items that they can recycle at home, such as food scraps and beverage cups.

But one of the main reasons stadium owners embrace sustainability so fervently is that they can significantly reduce energy costs and garbage-disposal fees.

**Q:** What's so green about Safeco Field?

**A:** Let's start with the actual infield, which was re-sodded last fall. All the old grass turf went to the local compost producer, Cedar Grove Composting, where Safeco's food scraps and food-soiled paper also go. Safeco Field's recycling rate (the percentage of waste recycled or composted) is a stellar 81 percent, probably the highest rate of any major stadium in the country. That's up from 31 percent in 2008.

Solar panels installed in March on the bridge connecting Safeco Field and its parking garage help power four new electric-car charging stations.

The Mariners support their stadium environmental programs with frequent public education. This year, 10 Mariners games will feature "Sustainable Saturdays" promotions with themes such as renewable energy, composting and protecting Puget Sound.

**Q:** Does Safeco's neighbor, CenturyLink Field, keep the green vibe going during football and soccer seasons?

**A:** Absolutely. Recent upgrades at the home of the Seahawks and Sounders, including the installation of high-efficiency lighting, solar panels and ultra-low-flow water fixtures, reduced the stadium's electricity and water usage by 21 percent.

CenturyLink's 600-plus collection bins for recycling and composting make it easy for fans to contribute to the stadium's recycling rate of 70 percent, compared with 34 percent in 2008.

**Q:** Have other area stadiums and arenas gone green?

**A:** Nearly every major local facility has sustainable features or programs. The city of Kent's ShoWare Center, home of the Seattle Thunderbirds hockey team, was the first sports arena in North America to earn Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Constructed with green materials including sustainably harvested wood and less-toxic paint, the arena also boasts exceptional energy- and water-conservation systems.

The massive renovation project at the University of Washington's Husky Stadium has a goal to recycle or reuse at least 96 percent of its construction waste.

**Q:** What's the hottest trend in green stadiums?

**A:** The stadium-sustainability surge is being fueled by partnerships with corporations and nonprofit organizations, coupled with coalitions among sports teams. The Mariners and other stadium operators have enlisted product vendors such as compostable-bag supplier BASF to help support new projects and public education.

The Green Sports Alliance ([greensportsalliance.org](http://greensportsalliance.org)) was founded in 2010 by the Seahawks, Sounders, Mariners, Seattle Storm, Portland Trail Blazers, Vancouver Canucks and the Natural Resources Defense Council. The alliance, which now includes 41 teams from the Boston Red Sox to the Anaheim Ducks, will hold its second annual conference in Seattle from Sept. 5-7.

Sports teams benefit from collaboration, but they also compete with each other in the green sphere just as they do on the field. Many teams keep rolling out improvements as they strive to have their stadiums or arenas be considered "the greenest." And in that game, we all win.

*Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services.*

*Reach him at [tom.watson@kingcounty.gov](mailto:tom.watson@kingcounty.gov), [206-296-4481](tel:206-296-4481) or [www.KCecoconsumer.com](http://www.KCecoconsumer.com).*

*On Twitter @ecoconsumer.*