



2015

EPA Gameday Recycling Challenge Final Report

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Chan, Jordan, "EPA Gameday Recycling Challenge Final Report" (2015). *Student Showcase*. 10.
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EPA Game Day Challenge at UMass Amherst Waste & Recycling Fellowship Final Report

By Jordan Chan



I. Abstract

This report highlights the EPA Game Day Challenge, a national collegiate competition where colleges and universities compete to reduce waste through recycling and composting at football games and tailgates. It provides a brief background regarding the other colleges and universities that have participated nationally. This report aims to discuss the need for implementing the challenge. In addition, this report examines the planning, people, obstacles, and results of participating in the EPA Game Day Challenge at UMass Amherst on Wednesday, November 12, 2014. In addition, the report considers the implementation of the EPA Game Day Challenge for future years at the University to demonstrate its continued commitment to sustainability, and the collaboration among different departments on campus to reduce waste and subsequently reduce our environmental impact.

II. Introduction

At the beginning of the fall semester, in combination with my role as Secretary of Sustainability in the Student Government Association (SGA), and my role as Waste and Recycling fellow at Sustainable UMass, I began to consider my goals for the semester. Based on last semester, I had some concrete goals in mind, however I knew that in my new position in SGA, I had to focus my energy on projects that would make the biggest impact to improve sustainability on campus. Not knowing the challenges that may prevent this event from being successful, I decided that the EPA Game Day Challenge would be an excellent opportunity for the University to engage students to compete against other colleges and universities to reduce waste at our newly renovated McGuirk Stadium, with a LEED certified press box. I thought that this would be the perfect occasion to demonstrate the University's continued commitment to sustainability.

The EPA Game Day Challenge is a national collegiate competition for colleges and universities to promote waste reduction at their football games and tailgates. During the challenge, colleges and universities compete to reduce waste at their tailgates and football games through implementing recycling and compost programs. The competition is run in partnership with the College and University Recycling Coalition (CURC), Recycle Mania, Keep America Beautiful (KAB), and the EPA WasteWise program. This year, over ninety colleges and universities across the country participated in the challenge, including Harvard, Brown, Purdue, and Boston College, just to name a few. In addition to the other schools that have participated in the past and implemented the challenge successfully for the past few years, there was also a need to participate demonstrated here at UMass.

The imperative need to participate in the challenge was demonstrated in the aftermath of the homecoming game on September 27th, the first home game at the newly renovated McGuirk Stadium in two years. This was a beautiful day, with seventy-degree weather, the first few weeks back at school, and posed a prime opportunity for students, faculty, community members, and alumni to gather to celebrate and kick off the beginning of the fall semester. Despite the fun times, the bull riding setup, the moon bounce, the food, the drinking, and no arrests, a deeper problem was occurring, one that wasn't going to be solved through police action. As students began to leave the parking lot to go to the game, the lot was left destroyed, with broken bottles, beer cans, solo cups, and beer boxes strewn across the lot (Image 1). The result was shocking; 22,000 pounds of waste solely littered on the ground, much of which could have been recycled, resulting in over 100 hours of combined manpower to clean it up, resulting in a \$28,000 cost to the University.



Image 1. A section of the parking lot after the tailgate was over. Disclaimer: this picture does not adequately depict the amount of trash that was littered on the ground after the tailgate. (Unfortunately I do not have a digital image of the ominous photo of staff shoveling trash into a bulldozer in the early morning hours)

III. Materials and Methods

After the homecoming tailgate, I received the go ahead to begin planning the challenge, despite some pushback from Ezra Small because of the short time frame to organize the event. There were only two remaining home games at McGuirk Stadium, Wednesday November 12th or Friday, November 28th, both of which were not the most ideal choices for the challenge. I decided that the November 12th game would be the best option, and registered for the challenge on the EPA Game Day Challenge website and decided to focus on the collection of recyclables at the tailgate.

In order to make this event successful, it required attending several meetings a week in order to collaborate with multiple departments on campus. These departments included the SGA, Sustainable UMass, Eco-reps, University Relations, UMass Athletics, the Physical Plant, UMPD, and the Office of Waste Management. As Chair of the Sustainability Steering Committee, I also enlisted the help of the members of the committee throughout the planning process.

My first official meeting in preparation for the challenge was with Ezra and Kate DiSanto, of University Relations. We discussed our plan to participate in the challenge, and the logistical requirements, along with the incentives needed to enlist volunteers. Kate was extremely helpful in supporting our mission to reduce waste at the tailgate. She generously provided us with limited edition UMass Football t-shirts, food vouchers, reserved tickets to the game, one of five \$100 gift cards to local businesses, maroon and white glow in the dark wristbands, and gloves.

Soon after, one of my peers in SGA, Kendall Tate, a senator and student member of the Football Marketing Committee, said that they had heard of my plans to participate in the challenge, and invited me to attend their next meeting. Both enthusiastic and nervous, I attended the meeting in the Chancellors Board Room to present my plan. Members of the Committee included Kate DiSanto, Nancy Buffone, Annemarie Morse, Todd McDonald, Ty Scheiner, and directors of UMass Football. I shared with them some photos from the homecoming tailgate, to express that our participation in the Game Day Challenge was imperative. They agreed to provide both support and assist with disseminating pre-promotional material via the UMass.edu homepage and through social media. In addition, I collaborated with Kendall to create a tailgating guide that included tips on night time tailgating and included a section entitled “Take A Minute to Recycle at the EPA Game Day Challenge” to inform students about our participation and how they can help (Image 2).

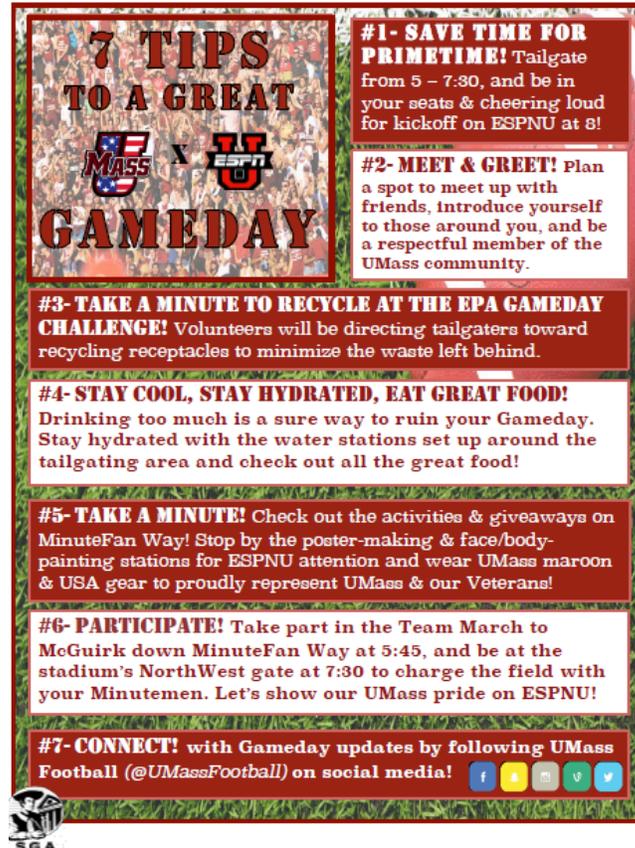


Image 2. “7 Tips for a Great UMass and ESPNU Gameday” flier was sent out to students prior to the game, informing them on how to be respectful members of the community, and also incorporated a section in regards to our participation the EPA Game Day Challenge.

In addition to attending meetings and planning the pre-promotional material to recruit volunteers, the logistics of the day also required preparation. I met with Pam Monn, from the Physical Plant and Mike Dufresne of the Office of Waste Management to coordinate recycling bins, golf carts, and a truck to collect recyclables after they had been weighed. Pam Monn generously provided us with twenty golf carts and many recycling bins while Mike Dufresne had offered to strategically place a dump truck in the parking lot, with a staff member operating it, for us to dump our recyclables throughout the night. We were even able to order an additional EPA Game Day Challenge Banner to place on the truck.

Leading up to the game, I had discussed with the Executive Cabinet of the SGA to work in collaboration with the UMPD to donate some of the proceeds from the redeemed recyclables to the Wounded Warriors Project. Upon following up with Tom O'Donnell, of the UMPD, he stated that they had just recommended the idea rather than suggest their willingness to help facilitate this. Unfortunately, due to logistical challenges we didn't foresee it being possible to incorporate due to the many other facets of the day. However, the captain of the Women's Club Soccer Team, Allison Thomas had approached Ezra and I about volunteering with members of the team, in addition to collecting recyclables for redemption to assist them in travelling to Nationals in Memphis, Tennessee. With only two days left until the game, we agreed as long as she was able to provide transportation for the collection and redemption.

Throughout the time leading up to the challenge, I attended weekly Senate meetings to encourage senators to volunteer, while also stressing that their participation could count towards their community service hours required for some of the senators. In collaboration with Meredith Berman, the Media and Marketing Fellow, as well as some of the members of the Sustainability Steering Committee, we worked together to create pre-promotional material and flyers to encourage students to participate (Image 3). Kevin Hollerbach also helped to create a banner that would be used at the tent during the tailgate and on the recycling truck (Image 4).

EPA Gameday Challenge 2014 Minutemen, take a minute to recycle!



Image 3. This lovely photo shows many of the key members that helped me make this challenge possible. Kevin Hollerbach, in his role as Eco-Rep Program Manager provided assistance whenever I needed him and along with Steve Amorin helped recruit volunteers through the Eco-Rep program. Liz Pongratz and Stephen Treat assisted by spreading the word and providing useful feedback. Clara Fenton, and Diego Fellows helped to spread the word, and Meredith Berman helped with much of the pre-promotional material leading up to the event.

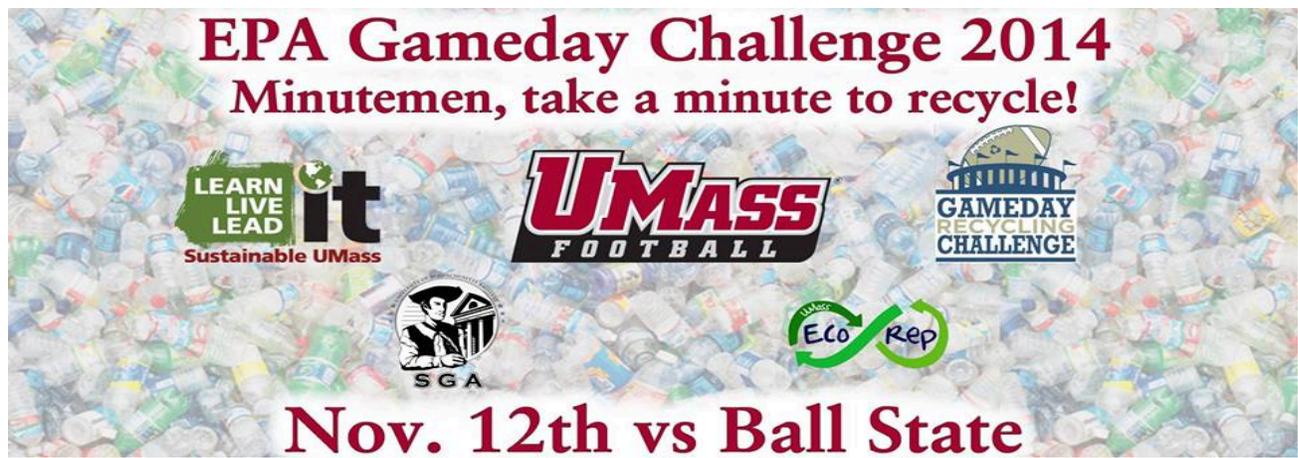


Image 4. This is the banner that Kevin Hollerbach and I worked together to create to use at the tailgate, which incorporated some of the organizations that participated.

Prior to the challenge, several journalism students approached me about our participation, and this posed a prime opportunity to spread the word about the EPA Game Day Challenge and enlist volunteers. One student in particular, Sarah Robertson, a writer for the Daily Collegian offered to feature me on the front page of the paper. She interviewed me and directed students to where they could go to sign up for the challenge. In combination with flyers on the UMass.edu homepage, Campus Pulse, the article in the Daily Collegian, and my peers spreading the word, we ended up with a total of 110 volunteers sign up to participate in the challenge!

The day before the football game, with a final list of volunteers, I devised an action plan to organize the volunteers in order to make the event successful. I had never organized over 100 people to do anything, so this in itself was definitely a challenge. I decided that I would delegate ten team leads, assigned to ten volunteers. The team leads would be responsible for driving the golf carts and the volunteers would walk through the parking lot collecting recyclables and handing out maroon and white wristbands. Each team lead was assigned to a certain section of the parking lot, to ensure that we were making recycling accessible to all members of the tailgate. I then designated Kevin Hollerbach and a volunteer to be responsible for weighing and tracking the recyclables, in order to report our data to the EPA at a later date. Throughout the tailgate the team leads, Ezra, and I utilized Voxer, a walkie-talkie app to communicate.

In addition to coordinating the volunteers, I planned a brief training to educate them on the background of the EPA Game Day Challenge, the proper recyclable materials that we were looking for, and their role as a volunteer. The UMPD also took this opportunity to provide an active bystander training for all of the volunteers.

IV. Results

Our participation in the EPA Game Day Challenge was a success! Throughout the tailgate we collected 850 pounds of recyclables. Both volunteers and the students attending the tailgate were enthusiastic about participating in the challenge, and were actively recycling when it was made conveniently accessible to them. After students had left the parking lot the volunteers and I used “Wonder Scoopers” (shown in image 3) to pick up recyclables that were left on the ground. The Women’s Club Soccer Team redeemed 4,000 bottles and cans and made \$200 towards their trip to nationals.

Due to the success of the EPA Game Day Challenge, Vice Chancellor Enku Gelaye sent an email to express her gratitude for our mobilization of students to make this event successful, and how proud she was that we were able to accomplish this.

Ezra, Kevin Hollerbach, and I were interviewed and featured on ABC40 during the night of the challenge. The Daily Collegian writer Sarah Robertson, and volunteer featured an article on the front page the following day highlighting the successes of the challenge. The success of this event could not have been accomplished without the help of the several departments on campus, along with the eighty volunteers that were present on the day of the challenge. The power of peer facilitation to encourage environmentally conscious behavior was evident throughout the evening.

In total, after the collection of recyclables from the large totes placed at the parking lot, the Office of Waste Management reported that we had collected 2,170 pounds of recyclables, including the 850 pounds that the volunteers and I had collected throughout the tailgate.

V. Discussion

I must say that despite the overwhelming amount of time and effort that went into making the EPA Game Day Challenge possible, I am pleased with the results, and the overall success of the event. After I initially approached Ezra Small with the idea of participating in the EPA Game Day Challenge

during the first few weeks of the semester, he was realistic in saying that he was uncertain that I would be able to accomplish this task in the short amount of time. This was partly due to the fact that there were only two remaining home games, November 12th and November 28th and the challenge would require the collaboration of many different departments on campus. His insight was based on the last challenge that Sustainable UMass participated in back in 2011, and said that to realistically accomplish this feat it would have required planning beginning in the summer.

The only major obstacle I encountered was engaging and ensuring the collaboration among the different stakeholders throughout the planning process to make the EPA Game Day Challenge a reality. Once I was able to present the stakeholders with a concrete plan, they were more than willing to support facilitating the event.

Participating in the EPA Game Day Challenge has set the precedent for the University that we are committed to sustainability, not only within our own projects as fellows and eco-conscious students, but as an institution as a whole, including the athletic department. Through the collaboration of many different departments on campus we will be able to commit to participating in this challenge in future years and potentially broaden our focus to including composting as well. The several different departments I worked with to make this a success, including University Relations, the Physical Plant, and UMass Athletics indicated this is something they would like to assist with in future years. Ezra and I have decided that we would like them to take a more active role in facilitating this event, and possibly extend participation in the EPA Game Day Challenge for multiple home games at McGuirk Stadium. In order to help make this a reality, I will be working with SGA President Vinayak Rao and Ezra Small to make this a requirement for future Secretary of Sustainability positions, and potentially incorporate this into the bylaws. I would also like to make this a mandatory part of the Waste and Recycling fellowship position. I am confident that through the framework I have created during the planning and execution of the event, those future positions will be able to carry out this event successfully, continuing to reduce our environmental impact as a University.