

EDUCATION SOLUTIONS TEAM

Zero-Waste Commencement Ceremony Report

Millersville University
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THINK GREEN®



Overview

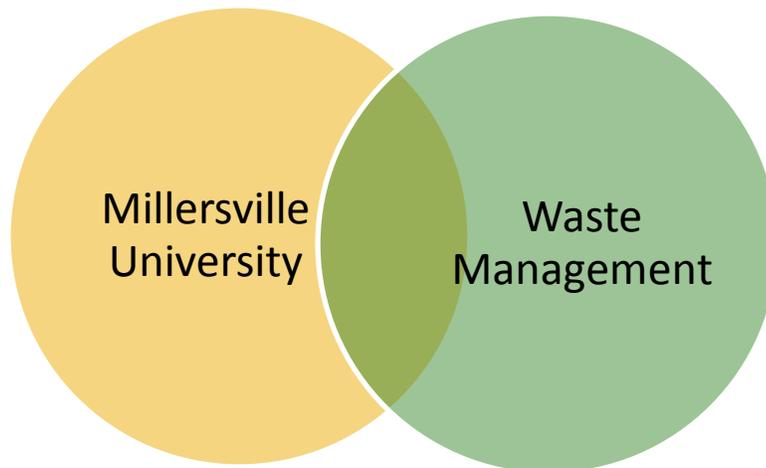
As Millersville University seeks to position itself as a thought leader in environmental sustainability, it capitalized on an opportunity to strengthen its commitment to sustainability and implement a zero-waste commencement ceremony. A partnership with Waste Management, North America’s leading environmental company, ensured that at least 90 percent all the waste generated at the 156th commencement ceremony would be diverted from the landfill. Preparations for this milestone event commenced months in advance utilized a 6-step model that included an assessment of the environment, developing and implementing a plan, measuring and reporting diversion numbers and evaluation of program activities.

6-Step Model



Establish Common Goals

Waste Management met with the university's commencement committee, representing various departments, such as facilities, dining and marketing to define "Zero-Waste" and establish common goals. It was determined that a successful event meant 90 percent or greater diversion of all materials generated at the 2-day commencement activities.



Conduct Assessment

A series of face-to-face meetings and conference calls took place over the course of several weeks to determine the available resources, capabilities and limitations. Local Education Solutions Representative, Brian Fuhrman, conducted a walkthrough of the facilities to gain a better understanding of the space layout.

Develop Plan

With data from the assessment in hand, the Waste Management team worked with the commencement committee to develop a plan that will ensure increased diversion at the two commencement ceremonies. The plan involved determining the optimal number and locations of both recycling and composting containers, developing a communications plan to educate and engage graduates and their guests, a contingency plan to handle contamination and develop a process to measure and report diversion data. It was determined, that we could eliminate all waste cans to ensure a 90 percent diversion rate and still be within acceptable contamination limits.

Implementation

Pre-Event Preparations

- EPA Guidelines - Strategic Business Director, Tom Kichline, contacted the EPA to get the guidelines for a Zero-Waste certification.
- Millersville University procured food serving and storage containers that were recyclable or compostable
- Recycling and compost containers were acquired and shipped to location
- Waste Management ordered and delivered (1) 20-yard Roll Off for Single-Stream Recycling and (1) 2-yard FL container for compost
- Collaboration between Millersville University and Waste Management to develop signage and communication pieces to inform and educate campus community prior to and during the event.
- Millersville University secured volunteers from nearby Penn Manor High School

Signage

2'X10' Banner



36"X20" Rigid Sign (affixed onto side by side recycle and compost containers)



4"X6" and 8.5"X11" Table Tents Rigid Sign (Placed in concessions and food service tables)

Event Day Operations

- Set up and place recycle and compost containers in select locations
- Placed “Zero Waste” event signage in highly visible locations
- Educate volunteers on recycle and compost materials, and prep them on how to engage and interact with guests.
- Check and replace bags as needed.



Post Event Activities

- Check bags for cross contaminants and remove.
- Transport Materials to Roll Off and Front Load Containers



Measuring and Reporting

A couple of days after the event(s), the recycling and composting containers were picked up and transported by Waste Management to the Waste Management Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Philadelphia and the Terra-Gro in Lancaster County respectively. The facilities weighed the materials reported the weights back to Waste Management. There were no issues of contamination reported at either facility and they accepted the materials without issue.

The final diversion numbers from the Professional Studies Commencement Ceremony on May 11, and the General Commencement Ceremony on May 12 were 760 pounds (640lbs recycling; 120 composting) of materials generated.



Evaluation/Recommendations

Overall, the Zero Waste Commencement Ceremonies were a success. With 100% of the materials generated at both the professional studies and general commencement ceremonies diverted from the landfill, this was indeed a “Zero Waste” event. Even with a high success of diversion, there were several opportunities for improvement for future commencement or other Zero Waste Events.

- **Eliminate brown trash containers from stadium:** Even though, the brown trashcans in the stadium were relabeled with recycling stickers, removing them from the facility will ensure consistency with all the containers and avoid any confusion.
- **Eliminate single serve coffee creamers:** These were the main source of cross contamination. They were not included in the materials on the signage; therefore, guests were confused on where to discard. Waste Management is recommending using reusable creamer dispensers. Eliminating this material will also reduce waste.
- **Training for catering staff:** The university catering staff working the professional studies commencement was unaware of the Zero Waste initiative and not educated on the recycling and compost materials, and the proper disposal of those items.
- **More volunteers:** The high school students from Penn Manor were energetic and excited about the event, however, more volunteers were needed to ensure that every recycling/composting station was manned to guide patrons as they disposed of their materials.
- **Stagger volunteer shifts:** Activity during the general commencement was highest right before and right after the ceremony. We recommend having a group of volunteers help at each of those peak times. This will avoid down time during the actual ceremony and cut down the time the volunteers would have to be available.
- **Involve concessions staff:** since the concessions staff has direct contact with the patrons, they could serve as ambassadors for the cause, engage, and educate the patrons while serving them.
- **Use different compost liners:** The compost liners that Waste Management provided were too small for the event boxes and as a result were not used. Regular liners were utilized
- **Limit outside items into the event space:** While there was very little contamination in the containers, we found a few Styrofoam cups that guests brought into the event facilities.
- **Apply a sustainability attribute to marketing and communications:** Create all signs and printed work with materials made of recycled content, recyclable, reused, and printed with soy or other sustainable ink.
- **Go Bigger:** Expand “Zero-Waste” to other sustainable practices, such as water and energy conservation, carbon emissions and use of alternative energy.

For any questions, please contact the following Waste Management personnel.

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