

twin cities + region

A leap toward greener competition

The Visa gymnastics Championships this week will be powered by wind energy and feature paperless programs.



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When Steve Penny surveyed Xcel Energy Center, site of the upcoming Visa Gymnastics Championships, the building's backwoods motif reminded him of the way the paper industry has depleted the nation's forests.

At that "lightning-bolt moment," the USA Gymnastics president had an idea.

Organizers of the event, Wednesday through Saturday in St. Paul, will team up with arena officials to exclusively power Xcel, RiverCentre and Roy Wilkins Auditorium with wind energy for four days and go paperless at what Penny called USA Gymnastics' greenest event ever.

Penny, who remembers being angry after flying over forests and seeing the effects of logging, said reducing paper use is a natural step.

"What we're hoping is that people see you don't have to walk out with a piece of paper or an event program to have a good experience," Penny said.

The sustainability plan also will include composting at Xcel Center lobbies.

Gone are the meaty programs and bio packets that cre-

ated what Penny called a "blizzard of paper." In their place is a revamped USA Gymnastics mobile site that feeds live scoring to smartphones, tablets and LED screens.

Spectators will experience little change other than where they throw out waste and how they receive information. The paperless system means fans in the stands will have access to the same instant information as gymnasts and coaches on the floor.

Xcel Center has already emerged as one of the country's greenest arenas. Its "50-50 in 2" program, aimed at cut-

ting trash and increasing recycling, has reduced trash by 1.2 million pounds and raised recycling rates from 15 percent to more than 50 percent by increasing the number of recycling and composting bins.

Compost bins were used at suite level during Wild games last season, but the Visa Championships will mark the first time that the bins will appear in the Xcel Center's lobby throughout an event.

The program got a test run and a positive reaction from the public during the NHL

Event continues on A9

ABOVE: Alicia Sacramone performed during the floor exercise in the CoverGirl Classic gymnastics competition in Chicago in July. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Competition goes green with wind, less waste

◀ EVENT FROM A7

Draft on June 24-25, said Matt Fujinaka, senior operations manager at the RiverCentre.

"I think people are really ready for this, especially here in the Twin Cities," Fujinaka said. "When you have the backing of the events that come into the buildings, it really helps our initiatives as well."

USA Gymnastics is also the first organization to purchase wind power from the Windsource program for all three buildings. Buying for the entire event will be about \$4,000 more expensive than regular power but will offset between 220 and 250 metric

tons of carbon in four days, the equivalent of taking 41 to 46 cars off the road for a year.

The real environmental effect of sustainability initiatives like the Visa Championships will occur through commitment to green efforts over time, and not just at one four-day event.

"I'm not sure what you can do in a three-day period," said Timothy Smith, an associate professor of environmental science at the University of Minnesota. "What you can do cumulatively across hundreds of events and repeat exposure, it simply becomes the new way you do business."