



take KARE of your PLANET: Major recycling effort for big St. Paul venues

By Jeff Olsen 10/6

ST. PAUL -- As Wild fans cheer for pucks in the net, Xcel Energy Center officials will be watching for bottles in bins. It's the first step in what promises to be a big score for sustainability in the Twin Cities.

"Many convention groups that we're going after now want to know how green a building is, what we're doing to recycle," St. Paul Convention & Visitors Authority President and CEO Karolyn Kirchgesler said.

"Of the 2.8 million pounds in waste a year, we want to take 1.2 million pounds out of the trash stream and increase our recycling rate to 50-percent," Senior Director of Planning and Public Affairs Bill Huepenbecker said.

Backed by a more than \$100,000 investment, the project has been dubbed 50-50 in 2. Officials intend to cut trash in half and push the recycling rate up to 50-percent in two years.

"I do think it's an aggressive goal, but it's very doable," Kirchgesler said.

Doable, officials say, because of the all hands on deck approach.

"Our campus is so connected. And it makes sense because we have staff who work in both of the buildings," Kirchgesler said, referring to Xcel Energy Center and River Centre in St. Paul. "It really makes it easier to do the whole campus as opposed to one building. And it makes it more cost effective."

"We needed to enroll the whole complex and everybody involved in running the complex," Huepenbecker said.

And he means everyone, from the staff behind the scenes to visitors who use the River Centre's cafe and Xcel Energy Center's suites. Everyone is being asked to help eliminate waste and increase recycling.

"What we're trying to make it simple and convenient to do the right thing," consultant Patrick Reeves said. Reeves' company Progressive Associates headed up the effort to create easier to use recycling systems in front and behind the scenes of the Xcel Energy Center, River Center, Roy Wilkins auditorium and 317 On Rice Park.

"So all the signs were custom made using products that we sell on campus, Reeves said while explaining the design of new recycling centers that are now in place in River Centre. There's a bin for cans and bottles and another for paper. There's even one for collecting compost in the lobby. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, a similar system, albeit a much bigger one, is in place for staff.

"It's one thing to interface with the public and help them to do the right thing, but it's really the internal

operations of the service that we provide that's going to make our big impact," Reeves said.

Getting the biggest impact means adding things like a new compactor specifically for paper and cardboard.

"We've redesigned the way the campus collects and handles cardboard. It should double or triple the pull rate on that," Reeves said, referring to all the cardboard that is now being taken from trash streams. "Cardboard is great because that is a product that we can get revenue from."

There's also additional training for the kitchen crews about what's still refuse and what can be recycled.

"Primarily food, which is why composting is such a big deal," Reeves continued.

That food and everything that's collected eventually ends up in a redesigned waste center. It's perhaps the most important part of this new operation. In the center, custodians make sure what's been separated out elsewhere actually leaves the facility in the correct container. To make it a quick process, clear bags now hold trash, blue is used for cans and bottles. And captured compost comes into the center in green bags.

"We just want to grow and do better and hopefully be a model for others as well," Kirchgessler said.

Food waste and soiled papers that used to end up in area landfills are now destined for a local compost facility. Cardboard once collapsed and bailed by hand, these days is simply pushed into a powerful compactor along with piles of other papers. Add the bottles and cans being separated out by all those Wild fans and you have what officials hope will be a big score for sustainability.

"It's very exciting," Huepenbecker said. "Right thing for the environment, it's good for our clients, good for our business, putting less waste in the trash stream. To be able to be a leader on this and do all these things is fantastic."

[Click here to see the 50-50 in 2 Fact Sheet for facts, figures and what's new with this project.](#)

For more information on this program, visit one of the following facility's websites:

Xcel Energy Center

Minnesota Wild

River Centre

Roy Wilkins Auditorium

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