

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION FINAL FOUR

For the first time in the history of the NCAA Final Four, a sustainability committee was formed in 2011 to integrate ecologically intelligent practices into the event's planning and production. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) was asked to join as a founding member of the NCAA Final Four Sustainability Committee, teaming up with LG Electronics, Waste Management, Reliant Park, the City of Houston and the George R. Brown Convention Center.

The Committee began work on the environmental features of the event more than nine months in advance. Conference calls among all the members were held weekly, and during each call a particular environmental feature was assessed and action items to reduce impacts were assigned to the appropriate team member.

The first action of the Final Four Sustainability Committee was the commissioning of a Sustainability Performance Assessment to gauge current sustainability practices at the facilities and identify opportunities for improvement. This assessment was used to develop the baseline data against which the NCAA Final Four Sustainability Committee measured its achievements.

In the NCAA, 400,000 student athletes participate in 89 events each year, and millions follow NCAA events. Most of the 145,000 fans at Reliant Stadium in 2011 probably noticed the 600 newly installed recycling bins and the Jumbotron messages reminding people to recycle. They may have also realized their programs were made with post-consumer recycled content.

Green highlights of the 2011 NCAA Final Four events included:

■ **ENERGY:** With support from the City of Houston, 100 percent of the energy used by George R. Brown Convention Center (Bracket Town) was supplied by renewable wind power. Emergency power systems at the facility are operated by energy from solar panels, and energy-efficient water pumps that use 60 percent less energy than the previous pumps were installed. Water chillers at the facility provide cold water to chill all walk-in refrigerators and freezers, eliminating the need for individual refrigeration units, and powering onsite ice-makers that eliminate the need for trucking in ice. The Convention Center subsequently earned LEED Silver certification for Existing Buildings Operations and Maintenance.

At the Reliant Stadium, carbon offsets into wind and solar power projects were purchased from the Bonneville Environmental Foundation, resulting in avoided global warming emissions totaling 210 U.S. tons in CO2 equivalents, representing about 509,000 auto miles.

■ **TRANSPORTATION:** Green-e Certified Carbon offsets were also purchased through CarbonFund.org to offset bus travel between hotels, venues, and Reliant Stadium. To reduce idling time, buses were asked to shut down if there was a wait of ten minutes or longer.

■ **WASTE/RECYCLING:** Through the support of Waste Management Inc., Sustainability Partner of Bracket Town and The Big Dance Concert Series, the number of recycling containers at Reliant Stadium was increased by nearly 600, matching every trash can with a recycling bin. Those recycling bins will remain at the stadium permanently. At Bracket Town, more than 100 new recycling containers were added around the stadium, and only plastic trash bags incorporating recycled content were purchased. Over the course of the weekend, the Final Four recycled nearly ten tons of materials, including cardboard, paper, bottles and cans.

For the first time, Reliant Stadium started a food waste composting program for food preparation and food waste from suites, in two of their largest kitchens, and in four suite kitchens during the Final Four. More than 25 containers (donated by Norseman Environmental Products) were used in the back of the house to implement this program. The program collected 0.87 tons of food waste. During the Final Four weekend, George R. Brown Convention Center also collected between 1 to 1.5 tons of food waste from all catered events and food preparations for composting.

Discovery Green, site of the Big Dance Concert Series, is a LEED Gold-rated facility. More than 100 recycling containers were distributed at Discovery Green to collect recyclables. The program diverted 5.55 tons of recyclables. Coca-Cola, an official NCAA Corporate Champion, promoted recycling at their Recycling Educational Exhibit.

The Press Room recycled paper, bottles, and cans.

All special event buses had recycling containers.

All hotels in the city-wide room block were encouraged to recycle and sustain their programs after the Final Four weekend. 79 percent of the hotels affiliated with the event had some form of recycling program.

In March 2011, the NCAA, the Houston Final Four Local Organizing Committee, Waste Management and LG Electronics USA held an e-waste collection event at Reliant Stadium, collecting more than 25,000 pounds of electronic waste to be disassembled and processed for recycling in the United States. Leading up to the Final Four, Reliant Stadium also recycled 20,000 pounds worth of CRT TVs when they were replaced with flat screen monitors. The CRT TVs are also being disassembled and processed for recycling. By teaming up with Official NCAA Corporate Partner LG, Conn's Appliances also supported the event at their 23 Houston-area locations. Every family that brought in products for recycling received instant savings at Conn's on any LG-brand EnergyStar® flat-screen televisions.

■ **FOOD:** At Bracket Town, 15 to 20 percent of food purchases were from local sources. At Reliant Stadium, unused prepared food was donated to local food banks and other non-profits.

All disposable cutlery used at Bracket Town events was bio-based and compostable. Napkins were made from 100 percent recycled content, and all cooking oils were collected for use as biodiesel.

■ **PAPER/PURCHASING:** All cleaning products used at Bracket Town were Green Seal-certified, reducing toxics exposure.

All copy paper purchased incorporated 30 percent post-consumer recycled content and FSC-certified fiber. Paper towels in Bracket Town bathrooms were comprised of 95 percent total recycled content with 15 percent post-consumer content, and the toilet paper incorporated 80 percent total recycled content with 20 percent post-consumer content.

The 2011 Final Four game programs were printed on coated paper including at least 10 percent recycled content and using soy-based ink. All paper used in the Press Room incorporated 30 percent post-consumer recycled content.

To reduce paper use, the NCAA Final Four created a new mobile cell phone application to help fans locate events, find restaurants and make reservations, among other functions. Printed fan guides were also eliminated. Event schedules were displayed on bus monitors, eliminating the need for printed copies.

■ **OUTREACH:** During the NCAA Final Four games, PSAs promoting recycling were played several times per game on the scoreboard, displaying the following message to 145,000 fans: "The NCAA would like to remind you to recycle your plastic bottles in the receptacles on the concourse. Let's all act responsibly."

The NCAA and the Houston Local Organizing Committee (HLOC) planted 68 native Mexican plum trees in Wiess Park, a local community park, representing the number of teams playing in the tournament. Houston-area residents participated in an educational ceremony alongside the tree-planting event to demonstrate safe planting guidelines, and community volunteers planted power-line friendly trees. Members of the HLOC Sustainability Committee and corporate leaders from Waste Management and CenterPoint Energy donated 68 recyclable Right Tree Right Place totes to the first 68 adults to arrive, and distributed 68 basketball goodie bags to the first 68 children onsite. The HLOC also donated basketball backboards and goals for the basketball court to the students of Grady Middle School. A permanent placard was placed to recognize the event.

The NCAA Final Four 2012 continued to expand on the sustainability initiative introduced in 2011, including hosting a new educational outreach event called "Greening the Hospitality Zone." Together with The Greater New Orleans Hotel and Lodging Association, LifeCity, and the Sustainability Committee of the New Orleans Local Organizing Committee for the 2012 Men's Final Four, the 2012 NCAA Final Four Sustainability Committee invited representatives of the hospitality industry to attend this event to share greening strategies, discuss ecotourism, and promote more sustainable practices in the hospitality industry.

In March 2012, the LG Electronics Recycling Program continued the e-recycling project developed the previous year, this time for New Orleans area residents, who were able to bring electronic waste to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome (site of the 2012 NCAA Final Four semifinal and national championship men's basketball games) for recycling. The eCycling drop-off location was designed to make recycling of electronic products easy and convenient—residents did not even need to exit their vehicles, as the eCycling crew members collected all acceptable electronic products from car trunks and pickup beds.

Also for the 2012 NCAA Final Four, REpurposingNOLA Piece by Peace produced 100 iPad cases using 25 street pole banners that had lined the main route to the Superdome for the NCAA Final Four Men's Basketball Championship, which was played in New Orleans. The iPad cases were provided to NCAA VIP guests and sponsors.

“The NCAA strives to make an impact on and off the court during the Men’s Final Four. As part of our efforts, we have a major focus on sustainable activities and increasing awareness of sustainable activities each year in the Final Four city,” said Byron Hatch, the NCAA’s director of championships and alliances. “The people in New Orleans, who assisted us with this effort, informed us about REpurposingNOLA, and the great work this company does with repurposing event décor elements into high quality products. It was an activity that we had not pursued in previous years. Therefore, we decided to pursue this opportunity as another activity to support the environment and raise awareness about various avenues to foster sustainability.”



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