

UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION

US OPEN TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIP



“Our courts may be blue, but we’re thinking green.” That’s the environmental pledge of the United States Tennis Association (USTA), which hosts more than 700,000 fans each year during the two weeks of the US Open Tennis Championships held at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

USTA partnered with NRDC to launch its official greening effort at the 2008 US Open, including the tournament’s first water bottle and aluminum can recycling program, and the greening program has continued to make strong improvements at every Open since.

“The commitment and expansion of the US Open Green Initiatives will ensure that the world’s highest annually-attended event is the most environmentally conscious,” said Jon Vegosen, chairman of the board and president, USTA, and chairman of the US Open. “These environmental endeavors have kept the USTA, the US Open and tennis fans in the forefront of the global effort to preserve the environment.”

NRDC’s collaboration with USTA began in 2008, when tennis legend Billie Jean King reached out to NRDC’s sports greening team. The USTA National Tennis Center in Queens, New York was renamed The Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in 2006, and since that time Ms. King has sought to assure that the facility is operated in an environmentally responsible way. The USTA commissioned an environmental audit of the National Tennis Center that led to the implementation of many changes, including adding energy-efficient systems such as individually-controlled temperature zones and variable frequency drives, which have reduced the amount of energy used by 168,000 kWh per year (representing an annual savings of \$34,000 and a reduction of 70 metric tons of CO₂ per year).

By 2011, other improvements at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center included court surfaces made from 17 percent post-industrial recycled content (that required 57 percent less energy to produce than traditional surfaces); ultra-low-flow faucets that reduced water flow by 75 percent; and energy-efficient lighting and refrigerator upgrades in the Players Lounge (reducing energy consumption by 50,000 kWh/year).

“We are taking a big step with the home of the US Open becoming one of the first in the tennis community to take significant action to positively impact the environment,” said Billie Jean King. “The US Open will serve as a springboard for other tennis events to declare their commitment and actions to a greener approach to our sport.”

One major innovation initiated at the 2008 US Open was tennis ball can recycling. The cans are challenging to recycle, as they are made from three different types of plastic polymers—a PET body, an LDPE lid, and a PVC label—and include a metal rim. NRDC identified a recycling partner, SIMS, who figured out how to cut the metal rim from the plastic can and recycle each part of the cans. As a result, the more than 16,000 Wilson tennis ball cans used at the tournament that year were collected and recycled for the first time.

Other US Open environmental achievements have included:

- **ENERGY:** 100 percent of the electricity consumed during the US Open is offset by the event’s energy provider with Green-e certified wind renewable energy certificates. IBM, which powers USOpen.org, switched to using only six servers in 2010, down from 60 in 2008; this change (and accompanying reduction in required floor space) reduced the energy consumption required by IBM for the US Open by 40 percent, and reduced cooling demand by 48 percent.

- **RECYCLING/COMPOST:** A plastic and aluminum can recycling program was implemented in 2008 with more than 80 new recycling receptacles (provided by Evian) placed throughout the center grounds; as a result, the USTA diverted 85 tons of waste from its waste stream in 2008, avoiding over 260 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Recycling receptacles now cover the National Tennis Center grounds on a one-to-one ratio with waste receptacles. The Open continues to add to its recycling and composting initiatives, with

programs launched in 2011 that include metal tennis ball can top recycling, and composting in kitchens and the Food Village dining area. In addition to collecting organic waste from kitchens and restaurants for composting, cooking oil is recovered for conversion into biodiesel fuel. The Open's landfill diversion rate increased by almost 30 percent in 2011 from 2010, with over 200 tons of waste diverted from landfill.

■ **REUSE:** 70,000 tennis balls used during the matches and practices at each Open are reused by USTA tennis programs or donated to community and youth organizations throughout the country.

■ **FOOD:** Levy Restaurants provides ecologically preferable paper products made from post-consumer recycled paper, switching 2.4 million virgin paper napkins to 100 percent post-consumer content in 2008. In addition, through its partnership with Levy, the US Open's local and organic food offerings represented 34 percent of the menu in 2011, with expanded use of organic produce and meats from local farms, and all food serviceware in the Food Village was compostable.

■ **PAPER:** In 2008, the USTA switched the paper it used for game day drawsheets to 100 percent post-consumer recycled content, and in so doing saved 2,123 gallons of wastewater and avoided generating 441 pounds of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gases and 129 pounds of solid waste. Currently, all paper products used on the grounds, including tickets, maps, tournament guides, restaurant passes, parking flyers, and napkins, include at least 30 percent post-consumer content. Many printed materials (program, drawsheet, etc.) are printed on paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. All paper towel dispensers have been replaced with motion-sensor dispensers.

■ **TRANSIT:** The USTA encourages US Open fans to use public transportation during the tournament, including a program first funded by NRDC and now supported by Esurance that distributes over 2000 metro cards to attendees, and through US Open-specific MTA advertisements urging fans to take the subway to the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. In 2011, 60 percent of fans took mass transit to the US Open, up from 32 percent in 2000.

■ **OUTREACH:** NRDC produced environmentally-educational PSAs featuring Venus Williams, Billie Jean King, and doubles champions Bob and Mike Bryan that were shown throughout the grounds of the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, including on the Arthur Ashe Stadium jumbotron, at the 2008 US Open (and at subsequent USTA events). The PSAs educated fans and attendees about the environmental benefits of recycling, taking mass transit, buying local and organic food, and using recycled-content



paper, as well as directing them to www.nrdc.org for more information. Two additional Green USTA PSAs produced in 2010 feature Alec Baldwin. NRDC's Eco-Tips reminding fans to reduce, reuse, and recycle are promoted in the US Open Daily Draw-Sheet, at USOpen.org/USTA.com, and in voice announcements heard throughout the grounds. Over 100,000 wallet-sized NRDC eco-tips cards were distributed to 2008 US Open attendees, directing fans to www.nrdc.org. In 2011, the USTA began posting these tips through its social media channels.

■ **MERCHANDISE:** Green products featured as part of the overall US Open Collection of merchandise have included 100 percent organic cotton t-shirts (designed by Heidi Klum and Billie Jean King), hats comprised of 50 percent post-consumer plastic (each hat containing the equivalent of two one-liter recycled plastic bottles), cinch backpacks (each containing the equivalent of six recycled plastic bottles), and reusable totes made from 80 percent post-consumer content. A portion of the proceeds from the US Open organic collection was donated to Unisphere, Inc., the non-profit organization dedicated to maintaining and preserving Flushing Meadows Corona Park, home of the US Open.

“The USTA is committed to reduce its ecological impact and continuously seeks new ways to be at the forefront of the global effort to preserve the environment,” said Gordon Smith, executive director and chief operating officer, USTA. “Our dedication to US Open's greening efforts will create a lasting legacy for the environment, as well as encourage tennis fans from all over the world to be environmental stewards.”

“If we just take small steps,” adds Billie Jean King, “it will lead to big change.”