

Green issues dug up in trash

A major step on the path to sustainability began April 30 with a comprehensive audit of Clackamas' trash

John Hurlburt

News Associate

The loudspeaker could be heard reverberating throughout the Oregon City campus Wednesday, April 30: "Step up and spin the wheel; everyone's a winner."

Such words are usually accompanied by giggling children, flashing games, prize animals and maybe the occasional pile of puke, but not hundreds of pounds of trash scattered on the ground.

Sifting through these piles of trash, in front of Barlow Hall, four Portland State University students, dressed in white Tyvek suits and looking like they just walked out of quarantine, separated the trash from the not-so-trash.

The scene was all part of the Waste Sort, one of the activities scheduled for the Sustainability Project and the beginning of a detailed audit that will help to measure the college's recyclable waste.

During the event, students

and staff were invited to come and witness the goings-on. Prizes were offered in a carnival-like fashion — a spin of a wheel, and whatever it landed on was awarded to the participant. The items were based entirely on sustainability, from all-natural pencils and reusable grocery bags to small trees.

The garbage, which was taken from three buildings — Roger Rook, McLoughlin and Randall — was divided into four categories: trash, compost, containers such as coffee cups and recyclables.

Clackamas has a recycling program — nevertheless, the campus itself does not recycle everything it could, according to Shanna Eller, a member of Community Environmental Services, the organization in charge of auditing the school's trash.

Of the four categories sorted through, the college disposal for two of them: trash and recycling. This means that everything else is almost automatically deposited in the garbage unless the student finds an alternative method of discarding his or her rubbish.

Clackamas does not currently have a process of disposing other types of waste aside from putting it in the trash, but that is not the biggest problem surrounding the college's recycling habits.

"Plastic bottles in the two buildings have

showed up the most," Eller said.

But while Clackamas does have recycling receptacles, they are often misused, and many items that could be recycled are thrown out, such as bottles because of their caps.

"Almost every one of the bottles has the screw tops on it," said John Wilberg, the lead custodian on campus. "The recycler won't take them."

For the Sustainability Committee, the Waste Sort was a significant occasion.

"This is something we have been looking forward to for months," said Elizabeth Howley, Sustainability Committee organizer.

Howley sees the event as important because "if you're ever going to change, you have to assess where you're at."

Normally, an audit so expansive would cost \$700 between the actual fee for the team to make the visit and the expense of writing up the report. Fortunately for the college, though, it was free.

According to Susanne Terry, a sustainability analyst

for Clackamas County, it was a combination gift, initially from Metro to the county, and then from there to the school via a grant.

The gift may be only the first in a series of ways staff and faculty plan on using the Waste Sort to slash costs and create revenue.

College President Joann Truesdell believes that the resources saved from cutting waste-disposal funds will be beneficial to learning on campus.

"I'd rather pay for another class, not another dumpster," she said.

Wilberg believes Clackamas should follow in the footsteps of Lane University, which he says makes about \$400,000 per year from recycling.

"I'd love to see us do that," Wilberg said. "I think we could make this a money-making program for the school."

Wilberg's idea is not merely an idealistic fantasy — he says that the college already saves about \$68,000 a year simply by hauling its own trash.

Although the results of

the Waste Sort had attention, it was the first of its kind at Clackamas.

The last sort took place in 2001, was by ASG and had a different look to it to Wilberg. Trash across the lawn at Barlow — which was covered — instead of in a small space.

The scene this time was much more contained, with the sorting taking place in a small area, on tarps about 20 feet long on each side.

Even though it did not take up the whole Hall yard, the sight of hundreds of pounds of rubbish was not amazingly pleasant. Rochelle Feltz, a member of the Sustainability Committee. However, she feels that the Waste Sort and other sustainability activities are in order for positive change to occur.

"We really want to see this," she said. "This is an opportunity that needs to be done."



Members of Portland State University's Environmental Services Committee worked from almost noon, sorting trash into four categories: waste, compost, recyclables and containers.



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ABOVE: Portland State student Will Elder works through recyclables.



ABOVE: Large bags of trash collected from McLoughlin, Roger Rook and Randall halls were torn apart and sorted through.