

WomAdelaide waste management gets rave reviews

According to the critics and the crowds, WomAdelaide 2005 was an artistic success: a radically different kind of review also gave the event full marks for its rubbish-handling.

The world music festival, held recently in Botanic Park in Adelaide, was officially a "Zero Waste Event," which aimed to recycle and reuse most of the waste generated instead of sending it to landfill.

Caterers were permitted to serve only biodegradable plates, cups and cutlery and recyclable drink containers.

Through stage announcements and event pamphlets, the event's 60,000 plus patrons were asked to place their waste into either a "compostables" bin or a "recyclables" bin. They were also encouraged to take any other waste home because general waste bins were not provided.

The idea of separating event waste into recyclables and compostables is driven both by consumer demand for recycling and the increasing environmental and economic cost of landfill disposal.

Flinders Bioremediation, the University's waste and pollution management consulting company, physically audited the compostable event waste on-site over three days.

Project Manager Ms Raya Giffard said the Flinders Bioremediation team physically sorted through more than 65 large wheelie bins of compostable waste behind the scenes at WomAdelaide.

The aim of the physical audit was to determine how well the patrons and caterers source separated their waste.

"Patrons did really well," Ms Giffard said.

"Bins from the public areas contained less than seven per cent non-compostable materials. Most people obviously made the effort to do the right thing.



The on-site waste audit at WomAdelaide.

"Non-compostable materials included things like plastic bags, cans, glass, and nappies, and we even found a \$5 note."

The caterers generated a large amount of food preparation waste, perfectly suited to composting. Contamination levels in this waste were also very low.

"We have collected one of the most comprehensive waste audit data sets available for an event of this kind in Australia. The data can be used to further refine the education campaigns and waste collection methods for future Zero Waste Events."

"For example, it wasn't obvious to some patrons that the clear beer cups were made from biodegradable plastic, and they put them in the recyclables bin instead. Minor issues like this will be addressed at WomAdelaide 2006," Raya said.

"The high level of compliance shown by patrons and caterers alike is testimony to the efforts of the WomAdelaide organisers and Zero Waste SA to provide an effective waste collection system and education program."

General Manager of Flinders Bioremediation, Dr Richard Stewart, said that the compostable waste from the event has been used and set up large scale composting trials, with the view to providing a sustainable treatment method for this type of event waste in the longer term.

Event waste typically consists of food scraps, cardboard plates and cups, corn starch and wooden cutlery, and biodegradable plastic beer cups.

"These materials are all compostable using conventional methods, but the food component has the potential to attract vermin and to generate unpleasant odours if not managed properly," Dr Stewart said.

"So we are trialing a number of different methods for event waste including in-vessel treatment and static composting piles. We are also planning to trial worm farming."

Flinders Bioremediation, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Flinders University, is a specialist consulting and contract research company serving the environment industry in South Australia.

The Zero Waste Events Program is an Initiative of Zero Waste SA, a State Government body set up in 2004 to divert waste from landfill and partially funded by a landfill levy. The website is at http://www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au/prog_event_s.php



The final stage of the Zero Waste project: creating the compost.