

# Record Picnic Day turnout matched with record recycling effort

## Impact of zero waste policies on display at Picnic Day

*Written by MIKE DORSEY*

*Published April 24, 2008*

Unlike most students, UC Davis' R4 recycling program was hard at work throughout Saturday combating the largest Picnic Day ever with one of their largest recycling events ever. The Quad, Fire Station and the entire ASUCD Coffee House featured food booths using strictly compostable or recyclable materials with the goal of minimizing waste and recycling everything. The Quad was the area most at risk of wasted recycling opportunities; due to the record number of Picnic Day goers, trashcans throughout the university were overflowing. But Zero Waste coordinator Michael Siminitus and his group saw it coming, and were prepared for the rush. "We handled the Quad better than any of our areas because we had staffed collection stations. We did have to have trash cans because people brought food in with them, some of which contained Styrofoam, but overall we diverted a great deal of waste to recycling or compost," he said.

This is the third year R4 has made this attempt on the Quad, and they are improving their practices every year. More than 12 cubic yards of compost were collected and will be sent to a facility where it can be turned into manure instead of sitting in a landfill where it would release methane. Siminitus said keeping non-waste out of landfills is part of his group's philosophy. "We don't look at trash as waste - we look at it as valuable resources that are being misplaced in a landfill. All kinds of resources that are considered trash can become resources if they are diverted to a recycling program," he said. In the case of food waste, or organics, food is basically going into the trash and contributing to global warming because it will release methane once exiled to a landfill. Siminitus did concede that in some trash is really trash - in which case change must come from the beginning of the cycle. "There are certain resources that there is no market for, or no way to recycle that is economically feasible. White plastic forks, white bags, white paper plates, this is known as white pollution, and to eliminate that we work with people selling food and encourage them to use only biodegradables or recyclables," he said.

This was the first Picnic Day that the Coho had gone completely zero waste, as all plates, utensils, cups and napkins given out were either compostable or recyclable. Darin Schlupe, kitchen manager at the Coffee House, said it was a manageable transition. "We do zero waste catering from time to time, so we do have a source for biodegradable and compostable utensils, and we bought compostable trash can liners from R4, and a good deal of our paper products are already compostable, so we didn't have to change that much," he said. Schlupe also explained how the recycling rate is determined. "They've got special bins designated for the compost, and they will

sort through that and take out any trash that might have been misplaced, and then they get a count." Siminitus said the Coho excelled, especially for their first time operating its entire facility in zero waste fashion. "The numbers aren't in yet, but we suspect they achieved a very high diversion rate, way over 90 percent for the day. This was the Coho's first attempt, and I consider it an overwhelming success," he said. Schluep added that the Coho was pleased with the success will be going biodegradable/recyclable again. "We're definitely going to be doing Zero Waste again for the Friday of Whole Earth Festival," he said.

The specific recycling rate at all three areas monitored by R4 is still being measured, but Siminitus said they experienced almost complete cooperation from on-site vendors on the Quad. Though there is certainly room for improvement, this type of success is typical from UC Davis, the leader among UCs in recycling rate. On Oct. 9, 2007, the UC Regents approved a plan that sets a goal of a 50 percent recycling rate for all UC campuses by 2008, 75 percent by 2012 and 100 percent by 2020. This goal, according to UC Davis Policy and Procedure Manual Ch. 350 Section 05, sets forth standards and processes aimed at reducing waste at the source; encourages the purchase and use of durable and reusable products; encourages the purchase of high post-consumer content recycled products; increases the total volume of waste materials diverted from landfills to recycling processes; and ensures the long-term viability of campus recycling operations through appropriate educational programs, coordination, management and oversight.

"At UC Davis, we're going toward that goal in a major way," said Siminitus. "Campuswide, for 2007, we diverted 56 percent of our discard stream into recycling operations." Every Dining Commons on campus is already zero waste through their use of reusables, and composts its food remains on a daily basis. Siminitus emphasized that zero waste is a direction and a policy, and that it is not actually possible to achieve zero waste at this time. "But a big thing we're trying to communicate to the UCD campus is that throwing away food is creating global warming. Landfilling organics is producing methane, and about one-third of the methane produced by humans in the U.S. is coming from landfills. By composting, we can reduce the amount that goes in by about half and turn the climate problem into a soil solution with all the compost," he said.

MIKE DORSEY can be reached at [campus@californiaaggie.com](mailto:campus@californiaaggie.com).