

# Waste Systems Campaign Case Study

Spring 2020 | By Makayla Salas

## Project Overview

The University of Vermont has improved its waste infrastructure, from expanding composting facilities beyond dining halls to implementing waste reduction programs like EcoWare and a straw-upon-request policy. UVM Eco-Reps' work to aid these efforts this year included hosting Green Out the Gutt, where we helped waste-sort and waste-audit a home hockey game. We then took waste beyond its normal scope of recycling and composting, and thought about the waste created in fast fashion, leading us to host several swap shop events in reshalls. Alongside these swap shops, we held zero waste craft events and provided information on our social media platforms about the intersection of zero waste and environmental justice.

## Background

Zero Waste trends and challenges have gained popularity in recent years, leading Eco-Reps to think about the accessibility, benefits, and drawbacks of the movement. When introducing this campaign we discussed the money and time that was needed to implement some of the zero waste movement's actions, and kept these in mind when creating our social media posts about environmental justice and when providing community team programming that promoted these practices.

Thinking more broadly than individual actions, we considered the impacts of having a linear consumption economy, which produces more waste than we can see when we purchase the final product. Thinking about the more systemic changes that need to occur, and about where our items have been before they get to us, we provided swap shops to reduce the need to rely on the linear economy's products.

## Goals

1. To provide an updated list of suggested best practices to UVM Athletics and UVM Dining regarding waste at their home hockey games.
2. To provide resources and supplies to students looking to get involved in the zero-waste movement or simply reduce their waste production.

## Implementation

The UVM Eco-Reps program consists of 20 students that are divided up into five community teams, with each team assigned to a specified residential area on campus. Efforts included a campus wide intervention as well as smaller programming initiatives held in residential locations.

To equip the Eco-Reps with the relevant knowledge to tackle the concept of sustainable transportation, presentations were given by UVM Recycling & Zero Waste, Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD), Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), and Post-Landfill Action Network (PLAN).

- **Two Zero Waste Fairs:** These events provided basic information and essential supplies and resources to help students get started on the track to having a more zero-waste lifestyle. Also, students could bring a glass jar to decorate and fill with homemade zero-waste/DIY toothpaste or deodorant that they made.
- **Swap Shops:** Eco-Reps held four pop up swap events. We teamed up with the Outdoor Experience and Wellness Environment learning communities to host and advertise them. Students could drop off unwanted items (clothing, knick-knacks, outdoor/sport gear, small electronics, etc) and take things they thought they could make use of, all for free. We got donations from local consignment stores to make sure we had enough to start with and donated any excess to Goodwill.
- **Teas and Bees:** Eco-Reps paired up with UVM Tea Club for a night of tea (in reusable mugs) and beeswax wrap making.
- **Green Out the Gutt:** Our full-team effort included running “Green Out the Gutt,” which aimed to both reduce and correctly sort waste produced at a UVM men’s hockey game. Throughout the game, Eco-Reps stood by each waste station to help attendees properly sort compost, recycling, and trash. Following the game, the Eco-Reps performed a waste audit.
- **Social Media:** On our Instagram and Facebook pages, we revamped the 5-day zero-waste challenge from last year and provided information about environmental social justice issues in Burlington, VT, where we are located.

## Timeline

### 1/13-3/2

- Presentations from University of Vermont Recycling, Chittenden Solid Waste District, Agency of Natural Resources, and Post-Landfill Action Network

### 1/18

- Green Out the Gutt

### **2/17-3/3**

- Zero Waste Craft Fair
- DIY Zero Waste
- Career Panel
- Fresh Finds 2020: Clothing Swap
- Swap Shop
- Teas and Bees

## **Financing**

**\$252.22** spent total (all on community team programming)

## **Results**

Just like last year, Green Out the Gutt provided our largest audience during the waste campaign. We made a total of 3015 impressions, where 'impression' refers to any level of interaction a person had with the Eco-Reps program. Green Out the Gutt brought together UVM Eco-Reps, UVM Recycling and Zero Waste, and UVM Dining to support proper waste sorting at a game sponsored by Casella Waste Systems. Only 20 of these 3015 impressions were determined to be 'highly engaged,' where 'highly engaged' refers to an impression that feels meaningful, productive, and likely to have a lasting impact. At Green Out the Gutt in particular, a 'highly engaged' impression mostly refers to people who asked genuine questions and made suggestions to us as we were helping them sort their waste. We will use results from this event to further inform last year's suggestions to UVM Dining and UVM Athletics about how to reduce waste, and ensure that whatever waste is created is properly sorted.

The 9 community team events held (some of which are only stated once under 'implementations' despite being adopted by multiple community teams or community team members) garnered a total of 300 impressions, 192 of which were considered to be highly engaged. The Eco-Reps were particularly zealous and creative in designing events for this campaign topic, and unlike last year, we were able to extend the idea of 'waste' beyond the normal 'where do I throw out X' model and push into territory of fast fashion at some events. Broadening the concept of 'waste' is something we will probably hold onto in the future.

The zero waste and environmental justice posts we put on social media garnered a total of 362 likes from our 1050 followers. This was higher engagement than is typical, and we may try to highlight some of these themes again in the future -- especially environmental justice, which touches every campaign that we do. Providing a more critical lens about the social aspect of our work may be valuable moving forward.

## **Lessons Learned**

The average rating that Eco-Reps gave to all of the events we pursued for the waste campaign was an 8.75/10. This was in part due to the creativity and enthusiasm that the Eco-Reps had for their particular events, but in part due to the impression that we had meaningful interactions overall during this campaign. While we had a lower overall reach of community team events, as previously stated in the 'results' section 192 of the 300 impressions made were considered to be highly engaged. We can assume, because of the high internal ratings of events and judgements of our reach, that the style of programming we pursued was effective, and we may want to reference some of the events we did to redo them or adapt them in the future.

One recurring issue for this campaign's events was lack of proper communication about supplies. Whether that was an internal Eco-Reps issue or an issue of the people Eco-Reps was communicating with about retrieving supplies, there were some complications about making sure the right materials were in the right place at the right time. Moving forward, we probably would want to have some back-up plans in place in case we have a mishap with materials being available and ready when we need them, and ensure that we are being clearer with internal and external communication about what we need and when.