

In the fall of 2013 Red Lodge Schools embarked on a monumental task of trying to “Green our Sporting Events” by changing the method of beverage distribution. In order to get a baseline of our current waste stream, a dumpster dive was performed after a football game in October. The dumpster dive indicated 50% of trash from the game was recyclable material. The data was presented to the school board in November, and the reusable cup program was unanimously approved and financially supported.

In January, the reusable cup program was implemented with 750 fourteen-ounce BPA-free acrylic tumblers cups in stock. Despite the original idea of all beverages leaving the concessions area in a reusable cup, there were a couple of unforeseen obstacles. Although smaller Gatorade bottles are available at local grocery stores, our vendor was unable to get these smaller bottles for our concessions. The only bottles available contained more Gatorade than our reusable cups could hold, and therefore, were not able to be transferred into the cup. Also there was substantial anger conveyed from a number of parents about the requirement of a purchase of a reusable cup to get a soda. In order to minimize altercations in the concessions line, it was decided to still offer cans of soda. There was definitely some frustration with the implementation of the reusable cup program; the program could not be as effective as originally intended.

The biggest disappointment came when we conducted another dumpster dive after a basketball game in February. The amount of recyclable materials found in the waste from that game was again 50%. There were some questions raised about the reliability of comparing data to one sporting event to another, but the data from the football game was our baseline. Needless to say, everyone was disheartened. The waste stream data indicated our reusable cup program was not working and that we had made no impact.

However, the number of cups sold at each game proves some people had opted for the reusable cup. Throughout the basketball season and tournament, a total of 492 cups had been sold. We had helped 492 individuals become more sustainable with their beverage consumption at our sporting event. We were unable to track the number of refills sold during the season; but if we assume those cups were refilled just once then almost 1000 cans were not used. Utilizing a ratio of 32 aluminum cans = 1 pound, approximately 31 pounds of aluminum was not consumed at our sporting events. So despite not seeing a difference in our waste stream, we know that the reusable cups were purchased and used. In the future we will implement a system to track the number of refills.

The option of a reusable cup provided a more sustainable practice at our sporting events for beverage distribution. In addition, the pilot project has positively affected many members of the junior class. Instead of tossing that trash bag filled with recyclables, they have started sorting out the recyclable materials. We need to work to continue to change the public mindset regarding recycling. I think our new goal is to have no recyclable materials found in trashcans at our sporting events. We believe recycling must become more of a priority at the younger ages to see a more concerted effort of recycling at sporting events. We are no way done with the endeavor of “Greening our Sporting Events;” we have just completed the first step!