

From Mountains to Molehills: Waste minimisation at community expos

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Waste management is a major issue when organising public events, usually resulting in mountains of waste. AAEE-WA has hosted an annual, one-day Science and Sustainability Expo during National Science Week (NSWk) since 2009 with a key focus on waste minimisation. Our experiences, challenges and successes are discussed.

Background

Between 2009 - 2016 AAEE-WA has partnered with NSWk, Canning River Eco-Education Centre (CREEC), City of Canning, South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL), the Department of Parks and Wildlife and The Forever Project to present our Science Expos. These were held at CREEC between 10am - 3pm on a Sunday and showcased a broad range of sciences through the lens of environmental education. A range of low-waste initiatives were embedded within the planning, implementation and evaluation processes and underpin the presentation of the expos.

Planning

Numerous initiatives were considered by the Expo Planning Committee during the planning phase. These included: promoting the expo as a Low-Waste event; providing low-waste information to all presenters/stall holders and volunteers; selecting stall holders that supported the low-waste philosophy; development of the *Watch your Waste* stall; and purchasing sausage sizzle supplies in bulk.

Implementation

On the day, initiatives were implemented to support the low-waste expo. A two-bin system was introduced to encourage people to separate their waste and recyclables according to the signage provided, and were lined to allow for auditing at the end of the expo. AAEE-WA members hosted the *Watch your Waste* stall and presented resources including games, costumes, posters and a litter sculpture to engage with visitors about the importance of waste minimisation.

A waste survey was also conducted to evaluate visitors' knowledge and perceptions about waste and Keep Cups were offered for sale. Other initiatives on the day included: providing a drink station with reusable cups; activities modelling reuse and recycling; volunteer bin monitors; and volunteers circulating in the 'Sam the Can' costume to promote recycling.



'Sam the Can' engaging with a visitor about waste issues

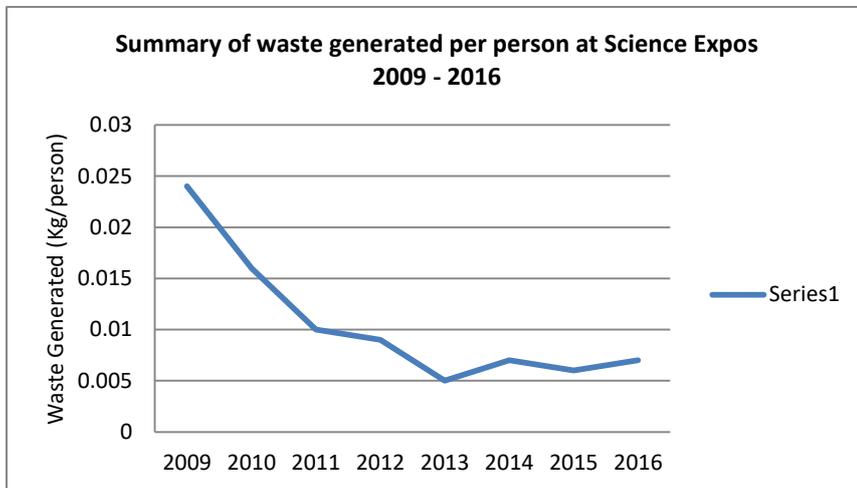
Evaluation

At the end of each expo, bin contents were weighed and audited to assess visitors' waste separation behaviour. The recorded weights were combined with the estimated number of attendees to assess the amount of waste generated per person during the expo.



Weighing and auditing labelled bin bags

Over the eight years, while expo attendances increased from 300 (2009) to 3000 (2016), the amount of waste generated per person fell from 0.024kg to 0.007kg, indicating our successes. Results from the waste surveys continue to indicate that people have a positive attitude toward recycling and reducing waste, however a major challenge relates to knowledge about separating their waste correctly.



Reductions in waste over the years

AAEE-WA is organising another expo in 2017. The findings from previous expos continue to inform our planning and we are working towards an even smaller molehill this year!