

ZOOS GO GREEN

Zoos want to do the right thing for the environment. By embracing sustainable practices in their every day operations, they can be convenient, fun, inexpensive, and make you feel good. For zoo educators, these actions can be shared with visitors as messages of how zoos are “walking the talk” for sustainable living.

Zoos can live up to this “green” responsibility by substantially reducing their environmental footprint in the areas of waste, carbon emissions and energy consumption. Each and every employee can be part of this endeavor and can inspire others to take action. Together, zoos’ collective efforts can make a big difference!

At the 2008 IZE Conference, educators shared “green” ideas from their zoos. Here is what they said. Maybe an idea below will spark your interest and take-off at your facility.

Zoos Victoria, Australia

- Assign a sustainability officer at each zoo whose job it is to work on policies for the zoo and action ideas for guests. He/she is able to research options and offer the best solution to challenges that arise.
- Retail departments should ensure that products and packaging are earth-friendly and create the least impact possible. They also need to be mindful of the amount of trash generated.

Paignton Zoo, UK

- Offer “fair trade” items as souvenirs. Five years ago, these products accounted for about 5% of sales, today it’s 20% of sales. Green products are not only the right thing to do, but also support consumer trends.
- Work with your restaurants to ensure food items do not contain palm oil and that suppliers understand that you will not buy non-sustainable items.

Busch Gardens, U.S.

- Focus one gift shop on environmentally friendly products. Develop a staff training lesson that presents information about the products and their level of sustainability. Have the education team train this lesson to the retail staff so that they can be knowledgeable when speaking to visitors about these environmentally-sound products.

- When there is a story behind the items, visitors purchase them more frequently.

Rotterdam Zoo, The Netherlands

- Create a "Green Team," that is composed of members from all areas of the zoo. Develop a list of green actions with input from all zoo areas and prioritize them.
- This team works on completing the list of desired items/action steps. This team has already installed solar panels and wants to build a windmill. Having a wish list of green ideas allows the zoo to purchase items when the budget allows.

Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Gardens, Hong Kong

- A sustainability officer determines energy and water use through audits. Ideas for reduction are suggested and implemented. Energy/water audits measure any change in energy consumption.
- Install solar energy panels and tell visitors about them through a display that depicts how much energy is generated.
- Use recycled paper and always print double-sided.
- Use zoo mules to transport items around the zoo.

Zoos South Australia, Australia

- Each zoo has its own "Green Team," which monitors water, energy, and transportation/vehicle use.
- The zoos participate in carbon offsetting for their vehicle use and are eliminating old buses.
- Currently, older buildings are being retrofitted with systems for water storage.
- New buildings are built to green standards, so no retrofitting is necessary.

Taronga Zoo

- The car parking lot is currently under construction, so nearby parking is limited and can only be utilized if you carpool.

Oregon Zoo

- Staff are only allowed to park their car 4 days/week. The other day carpooling or biking is encouraged.

European Zoos

- Some zoos are re-examining their zoo master plans and eliminating tropical houses because of the enormous cost to heat and cool.

South African Zoos

- Voluntary programs for environmental sustainability accreditation. These programs include which products are bought, their business partners, transportation system, energy management system, and visitor education.

How can zoos make sustainable practices a part of everyday business?

Disney's Animal Kingdom

Start with simple steps:

1. Recycle cans, bottles, paper, cardboard, cell phones, electronics, electronic media, landscape waste, and construction debris.
2. Eliminate individual plastic water bottle usage in off-exhibit operations and offices
3. Print and make copies using the duplex function (double-sided)
4. Use a minimum of 30 percent, recycled-content paper for every day printing and copying
5. Turn off unnecessary lights
6. Minimize driving alone during work hours by using environmentally friendly options such as teleconference, videoconference, carpools, and public transit
7. Educate staff, exhibitors, and attendees to ensure participation in environmental initiatives in place at the event or meeting.
8. Avoid printing materials and disseminate information electronically via email or a designated Web site.
9. When promotional products are necessary, choose recycled-content or reusable options. As an attendee, only accept giveaways that you will use.
10. Provide highly visible recycling bins. As an attendee, look for opportunities to recycle.
11. Request that food and beverages are served in bulk containers (i.e. condiments). Do not pre-pour beverages; offer pitchers (i.e. water) or individual servings (i.e. iced tea) upon seating
12. Request that the meeting or event venue completes and returns the Environmental Assessment Checklist (below) in advance of planning.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

VENUE:

CONTACT NAME:

LOCATION:

NUMBER:

MEETING/EVENT:

DATE:

The (name of zoo) is working to reduce our environmental footprint by minimizing waste, conserving water and energy, reducing carbon emissions, and protecting ecosystems. To assist in our efforts, please let us know about the environmental options at your venue (location of meeting/conference.)

We are interested in knowing if you have an environmental policy that we can access online or that you can send electronically. If so, please provide the link or attachment of your document along with this completed checklist as soon as possible.

1. What recycling programs do you have in place? (*Select all that apply*)

Paper
Cardboard
Glass bottles
Aluminum cans
Plastic bottles
Shrink wrap
Electronics
Composting food waste
Composting landscape waste
Hazardous or universal waste handling
Sorting recyclables at an off-site facility

Other: _____

2. Do you offer any of the following from which visitors can choose?

(*Select all that apply*)

Sustainable seafood
Humanely farmed food options
Organic food options
Locally-grown food options
Vegetarian options
Reusable serveware, plates, beverage containers, and cutlery
Fabric linens and napkins

Other: _____

3. Are your facilities equipped with any of the following energy-saving features?

(*Select all that apply*)

Natural lighting in lieu of electrical lighting
Solar panels
Light sensors
Energy Management System
ENERGY STAR appliances

Other: _____

4. Does your facility conserve water using any of the following? (*Select all that apply*)

Low-flow plumbing fixtures
Irrigation management system
Wash only full loads of linens or dishware

5.a. Is public transit or other forms of group transportation available?

Yes

No

b. If yes, do you offer any of the following to make transit use easier for Guests, especially those from out of town?

Maps and schedules
Tickets or passes
Personal assistance for Guests

6. Are there any other environmental programs at your venue that you wish to share?

"Sustainability is a not an end point, but a journey!"

Ian Walton, Monarto Zoo