

Institutional Benefits

West Virginia University Environmental Conservation Awareness Now (WE CAN) is an environmental awareness educational campaign that came about as a result of the marriage of two separate, yet related initiatives.

WE CAN addresses the interests of those who are seeking not just solutions to the global warming crisis, but also ways of living greener. Most students care little about the dollar amount spent by WVU in the delivery of the services they expect in return for their tuition dollars. They do, however, care about decreasing the carbon footprint of WVU. From the perspective of university administration, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in utility costs creates an undeniable argument for support of the campaign. Few can argue with the simple, yet powerful message of conservation.

The basic message of WE CAN is “please recycle and conserve”, and light switch covers reminding building users to turn out the lights were put on all light switches. Posters reminding building occupants to recycle and conserve were placed in nearly every building. Mouse pads that are printed with the reminder to turn off electronics were distributed to students, faculty and staff at various student fairs. The WE CAN presentation was given to incoming freshmen, faculty senate, staff council, the residence hall association, all housing and dining services staff, all facilities staff, extension and 4H groups, and various other groups that made a request. WE CAN hosted a light bulb exchange—switching incandescent bulbs for compact fluorescent lamps—which was not limited to only the WVU community, but was open to the greater Morgantown community as well. This allowed WVU to emerge as a leader in the conservation effort, and set the example for all other higher education institutions in the state of West Virginia.

Characteristics or qualities that make this program or practice different or innovative

As a way of raising awareness about conservation and recycling, WE CAN sponsored its first Ecolympics Challenge. Residence halls competed against each other for a prize of their own choosing. Whichever residence hall conserved the most energy and recycled the most, per capita, over a five-week period in October-November 2007, would be declared the winner. In order to keep everyone thinking about sustainability, WE CAN hosted a different activity each week during the challenge. A trivia quiz was posted on the website and whichever residence hall had the most participants per capita won extra points in the challenge. A scavenger hunt was conducted during the final week of the challenge, with the residence hall that housed the winners getting extra points for the challenge. Individual prizes were given to the winners of these activities as well.

With respect to energy conservation, points were assigned to the ten teams that covered a range from one to ten—ten being awarded to the hall that conserved the most energy and one to the hall with the lowest conservation numbers. October energy data was compared to that of the previous month of September, and a % difference was calculated for each residence hall. Based on the point system, whichever hall earning the most points overall would be declared the winner.

The WE CAN Program allows for expansion into other aspects of university operations, e.g. transportation, purchasing, construction, etc. Because of intense marketing, the WE CAN logo is identifiable across campus, so using it to brand other green initiatives not only makes sense, but gives those initiatives a head start through brand identification.

How this practice can be used by others

This effective and innovative practice is an excellent example of a practice that can transfer directly to others. The WE CAN Program and the Ecolympics Challenge can be exported to and applied by other higher education institutions with very few, if any, changes.

With a few tweaks to the promotional materials, this entire practice can be ready to use by our colleagues in APPA.

Demonstration of management involvement and employee commitment

WVU administration has fully supported the WE CAN initiative, providing funding for residence hall prizes and for the purchase of promotional materials. At the official launch for WE CAN, the WVU President, joined by the Governor of West Virginia, hosted the festivities. Following the lead of WVU, Governor Manchin read an official proclamation, which he later signed, that encouraged all residents of West Virginia to “make the switch” from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent lamps. The launch was a media event that was attended by the highest levels of WVU administration, as well as members of the Board of Governors, the Secretary of the WV Department of Environmental Protection, City Councilmen and the Mayor of Morgantown.

The employees working on the WE CAN initiative are fully invested in the program, to the extent that they often attend evening meetings to spread the WE CAN message. This time is sacrificed to the program with no financial remuneration to the employee. WE CAN has grown beyond what was ever imagined, requiring a significant investment of time and energy on the part of the staff. While it began in Facilities Management, employees from other units within WVU (Center for Civic Engagement, National Research Center for Coal and Energy, Department of English the Office of the Provost, and the Intensive English Program) have volunteered to do presentations, maintain the website and help to organize events. These activities are done in addition to their usual job duties.

Students have also become involved in the effort; many of the light switch covers that were applied campus-wide were done by student volunteers. Bulb exchange tables at the first light bulb exchange event were manned solely by student volunteers who were seeking a way to demonstrate their support of this program.

Statement of Program and Results

Program

West Virginia University Environmental Conservation Awareness Now (WE CAN) is an environmental awareness educational campaign. The following activities were features of the campaign:

- Light switch covers reminding building users to turn out lights put on all light switches.
- Posters reminding building occupants to recycle and conserve placed in buildings.
- Mouse pads that printed with the reminder to turn off electronics distributed to students, faculty and staff.
- WE CAN presentation given to incoming freshmen, faculty senate, staff council, the residence hall association, all housing and dining services staff, all facilities staff, extension and 4H groups, etc.
- WE CAN light bulb exchange—switching incandescent bulbs for compact fluorescent lamps.
- WE CAN sponsored the Ecolympics Challenge. Residence halls competed against each other for a prize of their own choosing. Whichever residence hall conserved the most energy and recycled the most, per capita, over a four-week period in October, 2007, would be declared the winner.

Results

- Recycling--Altogether, the WE CAN Ecolympics resulted in the recycling of 10.2 tons of paper in a five-week period from the residence halls alone. In addition, 3,465 pounds of No. 1 plastic bottles were recycled, totaling 58,905 plastic bottles, and 539 pounds of aluminum cans, or 9,163 cans.
- Energy Savings—Summit Hall achieved the greatest energy savings, a 27.7% reduction of energy use.