

Environmental Awareness at Large Events

BY STEWART BOWMAN

Every year, groups, areas, and councils take on the task of putting together a significant summer camping experience for our youth. Whether they are called cuborees, camporees, or jamborees, these events have a proven track record of engaging our youth and leaders in a “full year Scouting program” and also provide meaningful encouragement in support of membership retention activities.

The challenges of balancing numerous diverse pieces of a large event may occasionally result in our forgetting a key fundamental of Scouting – care of the environment. Unless our youth, leaders, even the general public, can actually see the benefits of including environmental concerns into the planning and delivery of our events and activities, then our organizational credibility has to be at risk.

Surprisingly enough, there is limited information addressing environmental concerns in a large outdoor event setting. In preparation for our next large event, the planning team developed a list of 15 distinct and actionable activities. We hope that you find these of value in the planning of your next large or not so large events.

Fifteen Steps to a Green Event

1. Assess the potential impact of the event on the property. Consider engaging an external company to provide an Integrated Resource Management Plan that would effectively assist in the long-term management of the property from the natural resource perspective, but also address recreational uses. With this expert opinion in hand it is possible to adequately prepare the property, ensuring safety from dead/damaged trees, and assign camping areas for minimal environmental impact.
2. The impact of commercial detergents seeping into the water table is becoming a significant concern across Canada, resulting in an unacceptable level of phosphates in our fresh water resources. Outdoor dishwashing or personal washing should not contribute to the level of phosphates. Encourage the use of phosphate-free detergents by making environmentally friendly detergents available for purchase during the event or ask participants to bring this in their gear.
3. The widespread use of commercially prepared bottled water is always a touchy issue. If the event water supply is from a city residential water system, consider not providing any bottled water at all. The expense to participants doesn't make sense; neither does adding plastic bottles to the recycling depot. Encourage all participants to bring a personal water bottle or canteen, and keep refilling it!

Keeping tents close together minimizes the impact on the land. Damaged areas can be easily reseeded and renewed afterwards.



Photo: Rod Wilson

4. The protection of Canada's natural water supplies has to start entering everyone's awareness activities. Numerous sources, plus our own camping experiences, tell us that showering is generally wasteful of this precious resource. Personal shower bags would solve this problem. With full instructions and guidance, participants could keep their bags and use them at other camps too. (See sidebar below.)
5. Also on the theme of protecting our water supply, ever notice that youth enjoy playing around at water taps – having water fights; washing; cooling off; and so on? To help minimize the water loss as a result of such activities, install spring loaded water taps at all faucets like many provincial parks do.

Personal Shower

These black plastic shower bags carry sufficient water for a good shower; simply fill them with cold water and leave them in the sun to warm. Users carry it to the shower stall, hook it up and then control the water flow. It encourages a quick but thorough shower as, when the bag is emptied, obviously there's no more water!

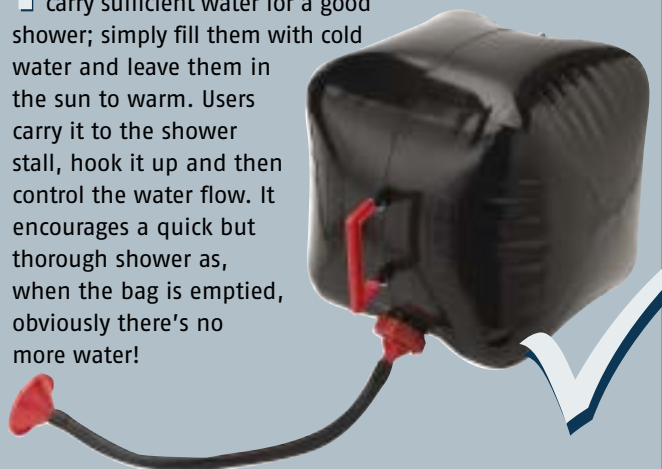


Photo: Courtesy of Reliance Products Ltd.

6. If food shopping is done at a store on site, don't use plastic bags to carry the groceries. Provide each participant with their own "green" shopping bag. Again, participants can keep that bag for use at other camps or at home. As a cost saving measure, explore options to get the bags donated.
7. The use of vehicles at camp is always a challenge, both for participating units and event managers. While certain service vehicles are obviously required, try to keep them to an absolute minimum. Don't allow personal vehicles to enter the campgrounds during the event.
8. Establish a shuttle bus service between the event and off-site parking. Obviously there are environmental efficiencies to having a 10-15 person shuttle bus do the run back and forth as opposed to 10-15 vehicles!
9. Whether it's at the off-site parking area, or on arrival at the event, establish a vehicle "No idling" policy while loading/unloading. We should always practice no-idling (referring to vehicle engines, not social chit-chat!).
10. Recycling – not as easy an objective as first thought. We're so used to recycling at our homes, we don't think of the logistics involved in recycling at a large event. A good example of this is compostable material. Where do we store it until it can be taken away; do we set up our own compost heap? Great idea until you factor in the impact on the natural wildlife of the area. Consultation with the recycle depots in the area of the event may result in a solution.
11. Disposable containers are an incredible burden on landfills, and do not decompose in a short enough time frame. As a result, try to prohibit them at your event.
12. Organizing an event of any size does result in a lot of paper being generated. Whether it's for "management" information, or for items such as a Camp Newsletter, use post-consumer recycled paper.

Large events provide opportunities to renew old friendships and make new ones.



Photo: BCY Council

13. Similarly, to reduce the amount of paper, distribute information by e-mail. For most people today, this is a quicker way of getting information.
14. For the purchasing of equipment and supplies necessary to support a large event, buy environmentally sensitive supplies where possible. This includes items such as "Energy Star" certified equipment, vegetable based inks for printers/copiers, and so on.
15. You may also consider additional "off-sets" such as purchasing "green" power for the event, however at the present time there is still an added cost for such. Sometimes, the short-term cost may well be worth it in the long term in order to protect our fragile environment.

Environmental Awareness has been a cornerstone of good Scouting for over 100 years. Let's all practice what we preach, show by example, and acknowledge that we must all individually contribute – whether it's in the planning of events, or in our participation. \

– Stewart Bowman is a Service Scouter and former council commissioner for White Pine Council, ON. He consulted with the David Suzuki Foundation, who affirmed these are all excellent ideas to help the environment.





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