

## 1 Introduction and Overview

In November 2008, the Recycling & Waste Subcommittee (RWS) of the Chancellor's Committee for Sustainability and Energy (CCSE) recommended that the Office of Sustainability (OS) enter UIC into RecycleMania, a nationwide recycling competition. Since its inception in 2001 as a friendly competition between only two universities, it has grown to a prestigious event including more than 500 universities nationwide and around the world. The RWS recognized that participation in RecycleMania would not only have the potential to increase recycling rates, it would also serve as a vehicle for promoting the current recycling program at UIC.

In early January 2009, OS entered the competition in the benchmark category as opposed to the competition category. This was done for two reasons: (1) resources to support extracurricular activities and promotional campaigns were limited, and (2) the current system for generating reports on recycling totals is not suitable for weekly reporting, as required for schools in the "competitive" category.

At the start of the competition, the event was promoted using mass mails, posting to selected listservs, and using the EcoReps designated in each of UIC's departments. In buildings where the existing UICycle recycling program was in place, no extra measures were taken, apart from the promotion mentioned above. However, early on in the competition, the OS received numerous calls and emails from individuals in "Green Tote" buildings, expressing concerns regarding their inability to participate. To meet this demand, the OS located temporary recycling containers for bottles & cans in three buildings: Science and Engineering Offices (SEO), School of Public Health & Institute of Psychiatry (SPHPI), and the Disability, Health and Social Policy (DHSP) buildings. Facilities Management supplied the containers, and staff from the OS emptied them.

## 2 Results

As mentioned earlier, recycling data received from vendors was not reported on a weekly basis, therefore it is impossible to determine the exact amount of recyclables captured over the ten week period between January 18 and March 28. However, the monthly totals for that period showed an increase in recycling rates from 27.18 percent in January to 31.79 percent in March. Out of the three categories of recyclable materials (paper, bottles and cans, and cardboard), paper was the only category to see a decrease from 129.2 tons in January to 126.6 tons in March. Bottles and cans increased from 2.1 tons in January to 4.3 tons in March, and cardboard showed the most dramatic increase from 44.5 tons in January to 96.2 tons in March.

| Month          | Recycling Rate (%) | Paper (tons) | Bottles and Cans (tons) | Cardboard (tons) |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| January        | 27.18              | 129.2        | 2.1                     | 44.5             |
| February       | 27.65              | 123.7        | 2.9                     | 71.1             |
| March          | 31.54              | 126.6        | 4.3                     | 96.2             |
| <b>Average</b> | <b>28.79</b>       | <b>126.5</b> | <b>3.1</b>              | <b>70.6</b>      |

Although the final recycling totals for the academic year are still being tabulated and final numbers may change, any changes are expected to be minimal. It should also be noted that UIC's recycling rate is higher than the reported numbers for RecycleMania, however the competition did not allow contestants to account for recycled construction/demolition material or composted material.

## 2.1 UICycle

UICycle's paper recycling numbers reflect the overall decrease in paper recycling totals shown in the table above. Paper recycling totals started at 40.2 tons in January and dropped to 32 tons by the end of March. UICycle's paper recycling totals were the only totals that we had access to on a weekly basis.

| Month    | UICycle Paper Recycling Totals (tons) |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| January  | 40.2                                  |
| February | 32.2                                  |
| March    | 32                                    |

## 2.2 Temporary Containers (SEO, SPHPI, DHSP)

The average weight of a bag collected at each site was estimated to be 10 lbs. In SEO and DHSP, about 1 bag a week was collected, while in SPHPI only one every two weeks was collected. In addition, two bags were collected during the SPH International Event.

| Building | Number of Bags | Total Weight (lbs) |
|----------|----------------|--------------------|
| SEO      | 10             | 100                |
| SPHPI    | 7              | 70                 |
| DHSP     | 10             | 100                |

## 3 Conclusion

When reviewing the list of participating schools, it was determined that a handful would be considered comparable to UIC. The selection was based on institutions that were listed in UIC's peer group based on the determinations in the UIC Strategic Plan. Schools in these lists were similar in urban location, size, and they included a medical center. As a result 38 schools were identified and tracked through RecycleMania's online reporting. UIC's recycling rate earned it a 6<sup>th</sup> place ranking among the top ten schools in UIC's peer group.

| School                              | Recycling Rate | Rank |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|------|
| University of California-San Diego  | 30.54%         | 1    |
| University of Minnesota-Twin Cities | 30.20%         | 2    |
| Harvard University                  | 30.06%         | 3    |
| Virginia Commonwealth University    | 29.68%         | 4    |
| University of Rochester             | 28.87%         | 5    |
| University of Illinois at Chicago   | 28.79%         | 6    |

|   |        |    |
|---|--------|----|
| University of Michigan-Ann Arbor            | 28.63% | 7  |
| Stanford University                         | 28.45% | 8  |
| University of Virginia-Main Campus          | 28.16% | 9  |
| University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | 24.70% | 10 |

#### **4 Recommendations for RecycleMania 2010**

In future years UIC can improve its recycling rate and standing by addressing reporting issues, increasing promotion of the event, and adding extra recycling locations.

##### **4.1 Reporting Issues**

All of our vendors are willing to participate in providing recycling numbers on a more frequent basis in the future. In addition, a more comprehensive information packet should be used to attract vendors. The packet would include the following:

- Information about the event (e.g. size, other participants); and
- Point out potential benefits for vendors such as publicity.

##### **4.2 Promotion**

A campus-wide promotional campaign would increase awareness of the competition. Promotions would be started prior to the event and would include posters, emails, blogs, and announcements on UIC's system of information monitors. In addition UICycle's collections can be reported on a building by building basis. An internal paper recycling competition may also increase campus participation.

##### **4.3 Extra Locations**

The temporary bottle and can recycling bins located in SPHPI, DHSP, and SEO will be replaced with permanent building-wide systems this year. As a result more campus departments will have access to the UICycle recycling program in the following year. In addition, the temporary bins used in those locations can be used in other locations next year. However, there are still UIC buildings that have only partial recycling or no recycling at all. In order to increase recycling rates all buildings should be adopted into the full UICycle program.