

Ohio University Sets High Standard for “Zero Waste” Initiatives

Delivered in August of 2008, Ohio University's Wright Environmental in-vessel composting unit is the largest in-vessel composting system at any college or university in the nation. It is capable of processing up to 28 tons of organic waste at one time. Ohio University expects to divert as much as 25 percent of the Athens campus' solid waste from the landfill as a result of this project. Currently, the Central Food Facility is the sole contributor to the university's compost, but Sustainability Coordinator Sonia Marcus said Baker University Center would follow suit in the spring. The dining halls are next in line.

The site became operational in January, and under the direction of equipment operator Greg King, 8,995 pounds of organic waste were collected in the first three weeks. Usable compost is expected to be available by the end of April. Although the organic waste is processed in about 14 days, it needs to cure for another 90. The resulting nutrient-rich soil amendment will be used to improve university grounds.

A 10.03-kilowatt solar array—the fifth and largest solar array in operation at Ohio University—powers the unit. The resulting energy savings will offset the burning of 8,000 pounds of coal annually, or 7.8 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents. By diverting waste from the landfill, composting also combats the release of methane—a gas that traps significantly more heat than carbon dioxide and contributes to global warming.

— James Robles

