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2013 Virginia Green Travel Star Awards Green Travel Star



Green Attraction of the Year



Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center

Overview:

Approached by Laura Habr, a Virginia Beach restaurateur and coordinator of the Virginia Beach GREEN Resort Advisory Committee, with the idea of creating a pilot project to help businesses understand the ease of composting, the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation applied for grant funding from the EPA to embark on a 24 week project with 7 project partners. The Virginia Aquarium Foundation was awarded a United States Environmental Protection Agency Region 3 Solid Waste Management/Resource Conservation Grant to coordinate a Restaurant Food Waste Composting Pilot Project. Initially, finding a hauler for the organics to be collected took longer than anticipated. Once the project was underway it evolved into a year-long endeavor with the addition of three project partners. The project commenced in November 2011 and culminated in October 2012. Project partners were provided with roll-out totes (one or two per location, based on need) which they filled with organics. Our pilot project compost hauler visited each pilot project partner once per week, on Wednesday, to collect organics from the totes and haul the load to the McGill composting facility in Waverly, VA.

Project Goals:

The goal of this pilot project was to establish an ongoing composting program that would serve as a model for participating businesses and the City of Virginia Beach. The ultimate goal is zero waste and cost savings to participating businesses and municipalities.

Project Partners:

Initial project partners included the Virginia Aquarium Café, Croc's 19th Street Bistro, Doc Taylor's, Bad Ass Coffee, Rockafeller's, Tautog's, and Captain George's Seafood Restaurant. Additions to the project included Fruitive, Norfolk Academy, and Virginia Wesleyan College. Chip Hall of Natural Organic Process Enterprises (NOPE) was our pilot project hauler and organics were hauled to McGill in Waverly, Virginia.

Outcomes:

Over the course of just more than 11 months the ten pilot project partners collectively diverted 53,350 pounds (26.675 tons) of organics from the landfill and back into the productive cycle of composting. At least three partners are continuing to collect organics for composting. Fruitive and Norfolk Academy continue to collect organics for composting. The Aquarium Café also has continued to compost, and the Aquarium's back-of-house animal feed areas are also collecting organics for composting. Aquarium staff and volunteer kitchens are also collecting organics on a daily basis for on-site composting on our Nature Trail.

Lessons Learned:

As the project coordinator, the Virginia Aquarium received all collection reports detailing totals collected from each project partner each week. Some weeks showed much lower organics hauls from one or two project partners due to the wrong type of bag used for collections (not compostable) or contaminants (trash, recyclables) found in organics collection bins. Those were the two main issues our project partners encountered over the course of the year: the need to use the right bag for collecting organics, and the need to educate staff about what is considered compostable. The other issue is rather minor, but the need to keep organic collection bins clean on a weekly basis by hosing them out is a must, especially in the hot, humid summer months. Overall, collecting organics was reported as a relatively easy task by food service staff. The cost of weekly hauls may be cost prohibitive to some businesses, especially in relation to the relatively low cost of trash collection in our area. For those who understand the end goal of composting, however, the benefit is quite clear. Keeping organics out of landfills and filtering them back into soil development and production is much more beneficial to our environment.



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