

Pack In, Pack Out – Trash Reduction Program

2021 CSAC Challenge Awards

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Category: Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources

Overview – The “Pack In, Pack Out” beach trash reduction program aims to reduce the significant accumulation of trash littering the Los Angeles County beaches, which was observed starting May 2020 when beaches reopened to the public after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because uncontained trash on the beach can potentially harm human and marine life, this program asks visitors to “pack in, pack out,” which means taking back home everything they brought to the beach with them—including their trash.

Challenge – The Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors (Department) maintains 17 public beaches totaling 24.2 miles of coastline, including the associated beach amenities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of the Department’s beach maintenance personnel were assigned to clean restrooms five to six times per day. Unlike in years past, the Department was unable to augment its maintenance workforce through court referrals and seasonal hires. At the same time, beach attendance rose dramatically due to COVID-related closures of recreational facilities, both indoor and outdoor, as well as suspensions of organized recreational activities. With the increase in beachgoers and decrease in available resources, the Department saw a significant accumulation of trash littering the beaches over the summer.

Solution – From May through September 2020 the Department initiated an increasingly comprehensive communications and outreach plan for the “Pack In, Pack Out” program that included 100 outdoor “Pack In, Pack Out” signs placed at beach parking lot entrances, parking pay machines, and at beach accessways; a news release and social media campaign with the call-to-action; and distribution of trash bags to visitors by parking lot attendants at lot entrances and Disaster Service Workers along the beaches at some of the County’s largest beaches, including Dockweiler, Will Rogers and Zuma.

Innovation – The program engaged the public to participate in trash collection through location signage, branded bags, and a social media campaign with the objective of reducing the trash collected by the Department at beach facilities.

Results – From June to October of 2020, the County’s beaches experienced a record number of 31,268,038 visitors, which is an increase of 5,653,788 visitors over the same period in 2019. However, this 22% increase in beach visitors in 2020 resulted in only a 2% increase in the volume of trash collected during this same period. Furthermore, the tonnage of trash collected in September and October 2020 was *less* than the tonnage collected in the same months in 2019, despite *more* beach visitors in those same months compared to the prior year. This was a 16% decrease in the average pounds of trash collected per beach visitor during the busiest months in 2020.

Replicability – The program/concept can be replicated by any local jurisdiction that is responsible for maintaining beaches, parks, or any events with a large number of attendees.

Project or Program Contact –

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