

Trashy Festivals? Not Anymore: Warped, Lollapalooza, Bonnaroo Go Green



Eco-friendly summer fests aim to clean up after themselves.

By Gil Kaufman

Piles of plastic bottles. A carpet of pizza boxes. Backstage generators belching diesel smoke and fumes. Putrid, overflowing Porta-Potties baking in the sun. And enough wasted energy to light a small home for a month.

If these images are what come to mind when you imagine a typical summer festival or tour, you're either an environmentalist or part of the clean-up crew.

While the Porta-Potty problem isn't likely to go away any time soon, the organizers of some of this summer's biggest festivals and tours have come up with novel ways to reduce the environmental damage caused by their events. From recycled-paper products to hemp concert tees, eco-friendly irrigation systems, biodiesel fleets and the banishment of throwaway plates and utensils backstage, the Warped Tour, Lollapalooza, Austin City Limits, All Good and Bonnaroo festivals are getting their green on this summer.

One of the biggest initiatives is by Manchester, Tennessee's Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival (June 16-18), which is fitting, given the jam-band/hippie vibe it was tagged with in its early years. Organizers say they are going all out this year to lessen the impact the 80,000 attendees — almost all of whom camp on the grounds — have on the 700-acre farm that hosts the event.

Working with the environmental consulting company Earthchange Technologies, the festival's greening plan includes commemorative T-shirts made of organic cotton and hemp; biodegradable wraps, plates, cups and cutlery to serve concession food; and a sitewide recycling and composting program.

The organizers' goal is to divert more than 60 percent of the festival's waste from local landfills, a 50 percent increase over last year's recycling efforts. Working with Tennessee's WastAway, Bonnaroo plans to recycle 250 of the 500 tons of garbage produced on site into construction material and park benches to be used at future events. Even the toilet paper in the portable toilets will consist of post-consumer recycled products.

"We've looked at a lot that we can do to make Bonnaroo as friendly as possible, and we've read a lot about global warming like everyone else, and the more we do the more we realize we can make a difference," said Richard Goodstone, a partner in event co-producer Superfly Productions. "If we can get at the forefront [of environmental efforts] and educate people and lead the way, we'd love to be a part of that."

Another way the Bonnaroo organizers plan to lessen its impact is by using 25,000 gallons of cleaner-burning biodiesel fuel for all its non-music stage generators and running one stage entirely on solar power. Organizers have also arranged to buy renewable-wind energy credits from the American Indian-run energy company NativeEnergy, which will offset Bonnaroo's carbon-dioxide emissions and neutralize the three-day gathering's contribution to global warming.

There will also be a "greenest campsite" contest and "cool tags" for sale that will allow attendees to buy wind-energy credits to offset emissions from their travel to Bonnaroo. Organizers are also bringing back the Planet Roo eco village, which will feature educational materials on preserving the environment.

"We want to make sure that everyone is aware of what can be done out there," Goodstone said of the educational aspect of Planet Roo. "From wind energy to fluorescent lighting, energy credits and recycling, most people realize global warming is a big issue, they just don't know what they can do about it."

On the other end of the rock spectrum, say what you will about punk's nihilistic attitude, just don't tell Vans Warped Tour founder Kevin Lyman that it extends to the environment. This year, the Warped Tour got together with environmentalist Tim Allyn to launch the Warped Eco Initiative, spearheaded by a pledge to use only biodiesel fuel for the tour's 18 buses, 14 production

trucks and half its backstage generators. According to Lyman, by using Biodiesel B20, the tour will reduce carbon-monoxide emissions by an estimated 16 percent, or roughly 500,000 pounds.

In an equally radical move, the tour's catering company is launching a reuse-and-recycle plan backstage to cut down on the purchase and disposal of 81,000 paper plates by the artists and crew. Instead, Warped will use real dishes and cart dishwashing machines on the road alongside corn-based coffee mugs provided by a tour sponsor. Because they've had some problems finding the right hook-ups at a handful of venues, Lyman said the plans for next year already include a trailer that will be fitted with dishwashers and water tanks.

The reuse-and-recycle program is expected to turn thousands of recycled items into tens of thousands of dollars for local nonprofit organizations, according to Lyman. And, like Bonnaroo, Warped will also have a green stage, the Kevin Says/ Hot Topic Stage, which will run its sound system on a 40,000-watt, solar-powered sound system. Power for the tour's vendors will also be green, coming from a combination of B20 and B100 (100 percent vegetable-derived fuel), which will save an estimated 50,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. While the switch to biodiesel was initially going to cost Lyman a bit more, with rising gas prices, he said the increase is actually negligible at this point. "A lot of people say, 'Oh, big deal, Willie Nelson uses biodiesel on one bus and one truck.' But if we can make it work with all our buses and trucks, then you can make it work on your tour."

Organizers of the Austin City Limits Festival are taking an entirely different approach to eco-friendliness. At Zilker Park, where the Austin City Limits Festival will take place September 15-17, co-promoters Capital Sports & Entertainment and Charles Attal Presents helped the Austin Parks & Recreation Department get an earlier-than-expected start on a three-year plan to install a new irrigation system on park grounds.

The system will provide healthier grass for ACL attendees — as well as the Austinites who use the park the rest of the year. In an effort to offset its energy use, ACL has arranged to buy "green power" for Zilker Park through Austin Energy's Renewable Energy Program, using energy from clean, renewable sources to run some of its operations. CSE also purchased 50 megawatts' worth of energy credits from Green Mountain Energy to offset the emissions produced by generators on site.

One of the keys to Lollapalooza re-emerging as a destination festival last year in Chicago's scenic Grant Park was its commitment to enhancing the city's legendary green space. Organizers said the event donated \$400,000 to Chicago neighborhood park projects last year, adding that this year's pledge is \$600,000. This year's Lolla, taking place August 4-6, will also focus on environmental issues, with educational and interactive booths in the Causapalooza area as well as a "virtual march" coordinated by StopGlobalWarming.org.

Lolla will also be the first event in Chicago to make use of a new, easily identifiable recycling container that the Chicago Parks District is rolling out around the city this summer.

Even lesser-known festivals, such as the 10th annual jam-band-centric All Good Music Festival in Masontown, West Virginia (July 14-16), are getting into the act. For the past seven years, the event's promoter has hired Vermont's Clean Vibes to handle all trash collection and recycling on site, with the goal of leaving nothing but footprints behind on the Marvin's Mountaintop site. Vibes also cleans up several miles of access roads before and after the concert; this year, it expects to collect almost 4 tons of recyclable materials.

"We need to invest back into what we're doing and start the process of change, and maybe it will become standard practice in the tour business," Warped's Lyman said.

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