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One way Eagles can't lose

Game-day efforts show why they're ecological champs.

By Sandy Bauers

Inquirer Staff Writer

In the parking lot, the barbecue grills were sizzling.

In the locker rooms, players were taping up.

In a control room, electrical foreman Herb Keyser pressed "enter" on his keyboard.

And high above Lincoln Financial Field, 572 lights, 2,000 watts each, began sucking down enough juice to power 1,142 typical homes.

It was 6:30 p.m. Monday. Two hours before kickoff.

Major sporting events such as Eagles games are a big energy drain - and not just the emotional kind.

They can produce mountains of trash and use rivers of water, not to mention the tankers of fuel that 70,000-plus fans burn to get there.

But four years after steadily implementing ways to reduce their environmental footprint, the Eagles - though not the winningest team in the NFL - are certainly the greenest.

Maybe even the greenest in all of pro sports, NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

The eco-games begin with the tickets and programs (on more than 40 tons of recycled paper a year) and end with a double trash pickup geared to send every plastic bottle off for recycling.

The Eagles purchase so much renewable energy - 30 percent of it from wind and the burning of landfill methane gases - they claim to be the biggest buyer in the state. The University of Pennsylvania, ranked 20th in the nation by the Environmental Protection Agency, may beg to differ. But Penn bases its calculation on total amount purchased, while the Eagles factor in the number of employees.

It's the equivalent of powering all 10 home games (including preseason) on wind, so the Eagles now boast they're carbon-neutral.

It didn't help Monday's game, a 20-12 loss to the Washington Redskins. But while fans were trashing the team, environmental advocates thought the Eagles were awesome.

John Hanger of Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future will give the team an eco-award next month.

"They've won some very important victories for clean air and clean water," he said.

The Eagles reimburse employees for buying wind power at home - 112 employees have taken them up on it, at a cost of about \$7.25 each per month - and Hanger can't find another company in the nation that goes this far.

During the off-season, the NFL will encourage other teams to follow the Eagles' eco-lead, although McCarthy doubted any would adopt their eco-slogan: "Go Green."

Here's how it played out Monday:

8 p.m.

On the field at the 50-yard line

Linebacker Takeo Spikes, 6-foot-2 and 242 pounds, charged over from midfield, halted, turned, and then charged back, catching a short toss.

Just feet away, teensy by comparison, Eagles owner Christina Weiss Lurie smiled and chatted with friends.

In the Go Green program, she is the one calling the plays.

Lurie hired Los Angeles environmental and marketing consultant Tim Sexton, who had organized Philadelphia's LiveAid concert.

The team didn't just recycle; it began buying recycled materials. Sexton produced a procurement guide for green cleaning supplies, compact fluorescent lightbulbs, bio-based paints.

After an energy audit, the team ratcheted down the field's heaters. The Eagles figure the project will save enough electricity to power 275 homes and pay for itself within two years.

Last summer, atop the Eagles' corporate headquarters, workers finished installing an array of solar panels that track the sun, producing 30 percent more power than a fixed system.

"It's important that we're successful on the field, and off the field," Lurie said optimistically. "The two sides mirror each other."

8:29 p.m.

On the field

The cheerleaders shook their pom-poms. Behind the giant inflated eagle's head, the players waited to take the field. The momentum built. The music blared. *Fly, Eagles, fly . . .*

Last week, the players drove to the game. Next month, they will fly about 1,000 miles to take on the Minnesota Vikings and release a lot more carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

So they've been planting trees, which consume carbon dioxide, to offset it.

A Tufts University study has pooh-poohed the idea for individuals who pay some company they don't know to plant trees in a location they will never see. Will the trees even live?

But the Eagles have picked public spots right here. Donating \$125,000 to Philadelphia's TreeVitalize program, they planted 332 oaks, cherries, plums, ginkgos and more around 25 Philadelphia public elementary schools - 16 of which had no trees. More were planted at newly renovated Franklin Square.

A major Eagles forest - hush-hush for now - is in the planning stages with the GoZero program of the national nonprofit Conservation Fund.

9:34 p.m.

The concourse

The Eagles kicked a field goal. For many fans, apparently, time for a beer.

A worker for Aramark, the concession operator, picked up a cup and opened the tap.

On Monday, fans gulped their way through 88,000 cups.

All the cups were corn-based plastic, which the Eagles say takes 50 percent less petroleum to make than a regular plastic cup. And instead of taking a few centuries to break down, the cups biodegrade in as little as 50 days. (Supposedly, an Eagles employee inadvertently tested this timetable; his car's backseat will never be the same.)

For the plastic water and soda bottles, the Eagles place recycling containers every 46 feet throughout the concourse. Experts who study such matters have determined that a typical person, not finding an appropriate receptacle within 23 feet, will just drop an item.

If the fans hadn't quite caught on - many stuck their biodegradable cups into the recycling containers for plastic bottles - so be it.

Likewise, out in the parking lot, bottles and cans were stacked around and on top of a recycling bin the size of a Porta-John.

By the front gates - no outside beverages may be taken in - workers would later scoop up discarded cups and cans by the shovelful and place them in the barrels the fans missed.

Paul Smits, facilities manager for Aramark, watched almost greedily, calculating the recycling potential. "That's one of my next challenges," he said. "How can I get that?"

10:40 p.m.

SCA Americas box

It was the third quarter. The Eagles fumbled; 10-6 Redskins.

In a suite high above the field, the carpeting (with recycled fibers) was lush. The room's three TVs, like all those in the stadium, had been replaced a while back and recycled. The dinner was laid out next to biodegradable plates made partly from bamboo.

And the napkins were trash. At least two times over. Probably they were high-end paper, then newsprint, now this.

Don Lewis, a vice president with SCA Americas, fingered one appreciatively. He pointed with pride to tiny black dots in the weave. "We call those recycle verification specks."

Lewis' company supplies all the stadium's paper products. Last year, fans went through 17 tons of it, including about 1,756 miles of toilet tissue.

This year, the products are "tree-free," and SCA says its processes will save a lakeful of water, half a ton of air pollutants, 70 cubic yards of landfill space, and enough power to run 10 homes for a year.

Inside a concourse women's room at halftime, Ashley Bittle of Medford Lakes was "impressed." Kate Federico of Philadelphia said it was "smart" to take on such a globally important issue.

Sue Gettlin of Fort Washington had more immediate concerns: "I don't care what it's made of," she said of the toilet tissue. "I'm just glad it's there."

10:54 p.m.

The big screen

The player was ruled down by contact before he fumbled, but the score got worse: 13-6 Redskins. The crowd grew somber.

But No. 21 was smiling. He was up on the big screen, talking to fans.

"Hey, this is William James," he said. "Carpool with your friends or take public transportation when you're headed to the game. And fill up your gas tank at night to reduce harmful vapor emissions. Be a playmaker, and Go Green."

It's one more way the Eagles are trying to get their message out, and that impressed PennFuture's Hanger.

Who better, he asked, than a sports team? "They're just so influential in our society."

12:28 a.m.

Top of the stadium

The team had lost. The fans had gone. The lights had dimmed.

A machine vacuumed the field, towed by a truck that uses biodiesel. The next day, crews would spritz the turf with organic fertilizer.

In the highest section of the stadium, about 100 workers pulled on latex gloves and shook out their plastic bags.

Jerome Belo of Philadelphia has been working Philadelphia stadiums for 27 years. They used to put all the refuse in one bag. Now they work in pairs, the first guy picking up the recyclables.

About 1:30 a.m., three figures trudged wearily up the steps. They were with Philadelphia's Blue Mountain Recycling Co., and they had spent the night assessing.

"A phenomenal job down on the concourse," said Bob Anderson, business development manager.

Since 2003, the Eagles have recycled more than 375 tons of materials.

The plastic bottles will be made into new plastic bottles, carpeting or fleece clothing.

The Heineken cans go to Anheuser-Busch; they will be new cans within 60 days.

So if you're drinking a Bud Light, Anderson said with a grin, "it could be out of a Heineken can."

Meanwhile, the cleanup workers, who wouldn't be finished until after sunup, continued their bending and picking.

Just visible down on the field was one of the Eagles' banners: "Go Green. When we recycle, everybody wins."

To see a slideshow of a night at the Linc featuring the Eagles' recycling efforts, go to <http://go.philly.com/greeneagles>

Contact staff writer Sandy Bauers
at 215-854-5147 or sbauers@phillynews.com.