

The Green Athlete

Contributed by Dave Hannon and Michelle Lang
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Forget trendy and forget the irony of being a “green consumer.” We athletes make use of the earth in a way that no one else does, and so it’s all the more important for us to take a realistic look around at how our running, biking, hiking and other pursuits impact our environments. The race directors, green companies and local athletes featured here are taking action and hope to inspire you to do the same.

This October, as runners file through the finish line at the ING Hartford Marathon, they’ll rehydrate at a 40-person, solar-powered water bubbler engineered specifically for the event. The marathoners, half-marathoners and 5K finishers can then fill up on Connecticut grown apples, regionally-based Stonyfield Yogurt, locally made apple crisp or a variety of 100 percent organic foods including bananas and salads. These efforts—in addition to aggressive recycling, fuel cell bus transportation, recyclable sugarcane water cups on the course and use of solar-powered generators—add up to what race director Beth Shluger hopes will be the “healthiest marathon in the country.” “There’s an opportunity not only for us to be eco-conscious, but to look at the example we set,” she says. “We’re making an impression on those 30,000 runners and spectators. We can be a leader in this.” With support from sponsors ING and United Technologies, Shluger and her “green committee” have been able to add new environmental initiatives in the last several years. The 40-person water bubbler, the latest green initiative, helped eliminate 10,000 water bottles from landfill and cost just \$2,000 for building materials, with UTC engineers donating their efforts. A step closer to going completely green, the Hartford

Marathon is one of many athletic events to align itself with the green movement. With the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reporting human activity as a driving factor in increased greenhouse gas emissions in the last 35 years, no activity is safe from the eco-radar. A run is no longer just a run anymore. It’s a higher percentage of carbon dioxide breathing into the atmosphere. It’s an increased demand for petrochemicals used to build PVC-filled athletic shoes. And it’s a greater strain on energy consumption to wash and dry the extra loads of sweaty laundry. Some race directors, and even athletes themselves, are now calculating this unique environmental footprint and considering it as part of their athletic pursuits.

Setting Standards One of the biggest and most recent strides made in green racing is the creation of the Council for Responsible Sport (CRS), an organization founded in September 2007 by Portland, Ore.-based race directors Jeff Henderson and Jonathan Eng. The CRS provides guidelines for event organizers and offers a certification to races based on credits earned in five categories: waste, climate, materials/equipment, community/outreach and health promotion. Henderson, who directs the Musselman Triathlon in Geneva, N.Y., says the idea of the CRS came out of the duo’s work in organizing events. “As race directors, we were learning about things like carbon offsets, eco-friendly materials and seeing a sporting event’s true impact on the local community,” says Henderson. “Jonathan and I realized the principles we were applying to our events could have broader reach and we wanted to create a way

for responsible events to be recognized, to provide them some education on how to do things better and allow participants a way to choose more responsible events." In an effort to get the word out about the CRS, Henderson and Eng made a presentation in January to a group of multisport event directors at the USA Triathlon Event Director Symposium. "Honestly, we didn't know if we'd be cheered or booed off the stage," Henderson says. "But feedback about CRS from race directors has been surprisingly, overwhelmingly, positive. We find many want to be environmentally responsible when planning their events, but they don't always know how to best go about doing it. By providing a framework and some resources on how to achieve their goals, the CRS attempts to capture this enthusiasm and make it reality." This year, CRS will perform audits at 17 seedling races of different sizes (triathlons and marathons) around the country, including the Hartford Marathon and the Keuka Lake Triathlon, to collect data and develop a body of information that other event organizers can benefit from. Henderson says one of the best first steps event organizers can take towards becoming more responsible is to recruit people from the event's local community who have a stake in the event's impact. "Getting someone involved who is passionate and concerned about the future of the sport locally can make a world of difference," he says.

Green From the Ground Up The JP Morgan Chase Corporate Challenge has taken its green pursuits worldwide, affecting about 225,000 runners globally and 30,000 runners in New York's races June 18 and 19. The race series has divided its green practices into procurement, waste management and transportation. In New York, these efforts translate to 100 percent online registration saving thousands of pounds of paper. On a global level, these practices—from soy-based ink printing of finisher T-shirts to recycling and encouragement of public transportation—will save enough energy to power an average house for more than eight years, says Alan Tieuli, Senior Administrator of Communications for the JP Morgan Chase Corporate Challenge Series. The company used standards from its own Office of Environmental Affairs to guide the greening of the race. "It is more expensive to do things green," Tieuli says. "It's probably like when you bought your first VCR—very expensive at first, but then prices drop dramatically. It sure is worth the investment." In the second annual TrySports Green Village Tour 8K in North Charleston, S.C., green practices literally make the race. The course winds through city streets, highlighting recent eco-conscious developments and revitalization efforts. In 2007, the course ran as a 5K and attracted 160 participants. Now, with so many new green developments in the community, Race Coordinator Bethany Burgee says that the sponsor, Sustainability Institute, changed the course and extended the distance to 8K, with the hope of attracting twice as many runners as the previous year.

Do the Athletes Care? While race directors are making strides towards green events, many struggle to determine if their efforts matter to athletes. Henderson says he was unsure of how racers and attendees would accept green races until he marketed the City of Portland (Ore.) Triathlon as a green race last September. It was an eye-opening experience. "I was just hoping to get the [green] message out to people but I didn't expect the overall feeling that was created on race weekend," he says. "From spectators to athletes and volunteers, individuals were genuinely invested in the mindset. I have never seen so little trash in the transition area after a race—people actually picked up after themselves and everyone practiced separation and used the compost and recycling stations fully." Leandre Waldo-Johnson, director of operations at RunVermont, the management company that directs the KeyBank Vermont City Marathon, says today most athletes are still selecting races mostly based on things like organization, prizes, course and post-race affairs, but environmental efforts are "clearly something that more athletes are thinking about. I don't think we're at the tipping point of people actually seeking out green races yet." She says the hope is that as more athletes see the changes some races are making, "they'll think about the positive change that was made by the race and will be encouraged to either look for similar events or use the idea themselves." The green shade of a race certainly matters to Will Harlan. In fact, if there was a national search for the greenest runner, there's a good chance that the 32-year-old editor from Barnardville, N.C.

would win. Harlan is the five-time champion and course record holder at the Mount Mitchell 40-Mile Challenge in North Carolina, a race to the top of the highest summit east of the Rockies (yes, it's higher than Mount Washington). With those kinds of results, Harlan has been approached by some of the big-name shoe companies for sponsorship but has instead chosen to run solely for the causes he believes in like Canary Coalition, Run for Africa (which he founded) and Blue Planet Run Foundation. "I've always been committed to protecting the environment, but I didn't realize that running could help protect it until I started winning races," he says. "I wanted to direct that media spotlight on more important issues like air pollution and the clean water crisis. All air-breathers need to be concerned about the effects of air pollution, but runners and athletes gulp even more air than the average person, so we should be especially concerned." Harlan has clearly put his green where his mouth is. He only races locally to conserve fuel and only consumes 100 percent organic energy bars and drinks. He commutes to work by bike and founded a 24-hour trail relay that raises money to provide safe drinking water in Africa. He trains almost entirely on trails right outside his front door to avoid driving to a trailhead. "And most importantly, I run with the spirit of the earth because I feel that connection is just as important as any of these lifestyle changes," he says.

What Can You Do? Now you want to be more environmentally responsible in your training and racing, but you're not sure where to start? Well running or biking to work is a great way to get your workout in while reducing air pollution. Even if it's too far to run the entire route, taking public transportation (or even driving if it's the only option) part-way and then getting out a few miles early and running the rest of the way is a good strategy. Beyond commuting there are other ideas that athletes can adopt to be more green such as using environmentally friendly laundry detergent. Marathoner and triathlete Bruce Rayner, chief green officer of Athletes for a Fit Planet, carries a plastic bag on his shorter runs through his hometown of Holliston. "I'm tired of seeing beer cans and plastic bottles litter the side of the road," he says. Given his transcontinental racing, Rayner also makes a habit of offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions his flights contribute to. Different providers, including some linked to travel websites, allow him to pay roughly \$15 to \$30 extra for a roundtrip flight across the country. His payment ensures that an equal amount of energy will be produced through renewable energy efforts or forest-planting initiatives. Although it does not reduce the carbon emissions, the newly available renewable energy neutralizes the emissions from Rayner's flight. "It's something people need to start incorporating into daily practice because it is a cost," he says, referring to his jet-setting race schedule. "You are definitely creating a cost to society and to the environment." **Green Tips**

- Try running or cycling to work even if it's just one day a week
- Use environmentally friendly laundry detergent or consider buying a green washing machine (you do more laundry than most folks).
- Seek out events that either make an effort to be more green or raise money to support environmentally friendly causes
- Carpool to events when possible
- Buy sports drinks or energy in bulk to conserve on packaging and recycle those bottles
- Look into the manufacturing/materials used in the athletic products you buy
- Hold onto those wrappers. GU will send you a free energy gel packet for every ten empty gel packets mailed to them. And for every used CLIF® BAR wrapper, the company donates two cents to charity and uses the material to create recycled gym bags and backpacks
- Recycle old running shoes through Nike's Reuse-a-Shoe program or any other shoe recycling program
- Ask other athletes what they do to improve the environment.