

# NFL favors proven strategies for Super Bowl

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The Super Bowl isn't stuck in carbon neutral.

Now in its 16th year of working to make its biggest event an environmental windfall, the NFL for this season's title game in Tampa is building on what's already become a vast environmental program.

Among the expectations are wider participation from local organizations, more trees being planted and more cooked food being eaten. Renewable energy will be tapped for game-day usage, and it also will play a role in powering the many complementary events that stretch over the two-week span leading up to the game.

In addition, for the first time, the league this year is putting into play a way to measure the ROI of a tree.

"Each year is a brand-new situation," said Jack Groh, the league's first and only director of its environmental program. "But one of the guiding principals here is we want to do things that actually work."

Groh said the league, over the years, has developed an array of standard programs that can carry over despite the Super Bowl's annual change in venue. The program's mission overall is to reduce solid waste and increase recycling and landfill diversion. The NFL forms partnerships in each host community and helps develop systems that can be implemented with local resources and can carry on without outside funding.

The league doesn't use its events to experiment, Groh said. It puts into play green efforts proven to show results, such as making the majority of its 300-car fleet for the game flex-fuel vehicles, or re-using after the Super Bowl every element it can from the championship game décor, from fence fabrics to office supplies.

"More and more, key vendors and partners are participating, and in fact now it is part of our contract with key vendors as old agreements expire," said Frank Supovitz, the NFL's senior vice president of events.

In Tampa Bay, the league has found major community buy-in among volunteers, nonprofits and municipalities, said Reid Sigmon, executive director of the Tampa Bay Super Bowl Host Committee.

"The thing that strikes me is the program keeps getting better and more refined," said Sigmon, who held the same role in Jacksonville in 2006.

A core component of the NFL's Super Bowl green efforts is tree planting. The league started planting trees at Super Bowl sites as part of its push to declare itself "carbon neutral" from the impact of people, parties and buses descending on the host community.

The league now, however, is changing its game plan when it comes to claims about carbon impact. The focus is more on efforts and actions and less on the jargon and language that can come with so many green efforts.

"We no longer use 'carbon neutral' or other buzz words that invite criticism," Groh said.

Instead of shooting for a goal that may or may not be attainable, Groh said, the league is taking all practical, productive and reasonable steps it can to make a lasting environmental impact. According to Sigmon, that means measurement is a prominent theme this year. The league wants to make sure its efforts are scientifically valid and supportable.

Said Supovitz, "That's our first priority. When we say we do something, we have it to back it up."

To that end, for the first time at a Super Bowl, the U.S. Forest Service is implementing in Tampa a public domain software monitoring system called i-Tree that it developed with Kent, Ohio-based Davey Tree Expert Co. The software, its components 10 years in the making, is expected to do a far more accurate job of monitoring the carbon impact of the tree-planting efforts than current systems offer. That technology, in turn, will help forestry officials safeguard the trees' future.

The program describes tree management needs and quantifies the value of annual environmental and aesthetic benefits such as energy conservation, air quality improvement, CO2 reduction, storm water control and property value increases.

The software can actually measure the quantities of the tree's attributes. The hope is that it will reveal in much more detail how much carbon has actually been locked up, Groh said.



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**NFL environmental director Jack Groh un-trashed Glendale, Ariz., after the Super Bowl this year.**

"That way, in three years, sponsors can say, 'By the way, those trees locked up x-hundreds of tons of carbon,'" Groh said.

"[The] Super Bowl provides a considerable amount of leverage and visibility for tree-planting efforts," said Charles Marcus, urban forestry coordinator for the Florida Division of Forestry. "The NFL is such a recognized commodity that if we have their help to promote the concepts we are trying, it adds considerable weight."

Another focal point of the league's Super Bowl efforts is a food donation and recovery program, diverting food that is cooked but never makes it to the table. The league has worked with America's Second Harvest on such efforts. Last year, in Arizona, the league recovered 70,000 meals. Groh said he thinks that volume can be topped in 2009.

The donations counter the expenses of soup kitchens, churches and local shelters with an in-kind donation of more than \$150,000.

It's also Groh's mission to recover elements such as raw construction materials or lightly used sporting goods and books and get them in the hands of nonprofits to be reused or auctioned off at fundraisers.

The league made \$600,000 worth of total measurable contributions in Arizona in 2007 and is slated to top that in Florida this year.

"In many cases, the value of the donations and reuse of materials is many times more than the operating budgets for some of these programs," Groh said.

*Alexis Muellner is editor of the Tampa Bay Business Journal, an affiliated publication.*