

One Green Step



In 2009, the City of Austin's Solid Waste Services Department began planning an environmental awareness campaign in honor of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. What evolved was the One Green Step campaign, with Austinite, citizen astronaut and environmentalist Richard Garriott serving as the spokesperson.

Garriott, one of the few private individuals to go into space, is renowned among computer gamers as the creator of the legendary Ultima game series. He became an environmental advocate after viewing Earth through the window of the International Space Station and has since devoted himself to spreading the message that we need to protect our tiny planet by taking personal steps towards responsible, sustainable consumption.

"Viewing the Earth from space inspired my One Green Step here in Austin," Garriott said. "It's important for every person to care about the stewardship of our planet."

Combining a month-long media campaign and community-wide public event, the goal of One Green Step is to reach a wide audience throughout the city, especially targeting minority groups. Radio and TV ads featured Garriott, as well as Austin City Mayor Lee Leffingwell and local media celebrities, all committing to green steps they plan to adopt.

The City wanted to create awareness that everything we do in Austin has an impact on the local ecosystem. The advertising campaign provided and suggested easy steps people can take in their everyday habits. The ads suggested steps like:

- Using a reusable water bottle
- Switching to rechargeable batteries or taking old batteries to the City's Household Hazardous Waste facility for proper disposal
- Taking advantage of the City's weekly Yard Trimmings collection where your leaves and trimmings are collected, then made into mulch

Solid Waste Services hosted a kick off press conference on April 20, 2010 to officially announce One Green Step to the public. At the press conference, staff handed out invitations tied with one green shoelace. The one green shoelace was a symbol of their One Green Step commitment.

Inaugural One Green Step Event

On Saturday, May 1, 2010, the City hosted the inaugural One Green Step event at the Pan Am Recreational Center in East Austin. The event included a presentation by Garriott, appearances by local radio DJs and the performance

of a custom-written One Green Step rap song by Solid Waste employee Ivory Jackson, Jr. The event also included informational booths, free reusable items and a mural assembled by local artisans Austin Green Art with reused materials like old billboard vinyl and garden hoses. A TV crew from the City's Channel 6 was also on hand to video tape attendees as they made their "green" commitments.



Backyard Composting

Backyard composting units were on display at the event with information about Solid Waste Services' departmental new initiative – the new Green30 Challenge. The Green30 Challenge is a pilot program challenging Austinites to do three things – take the City's free, basic backyard composting class, start composting in their yards, and decrease their garbage cart size to the smallest, 30-gallon green cart. Austin customers who do these three things will be eligible for a rebate on a home composting system. The rebates cover 75% of the total cost of the composting system (taxes excluded), up to \$75 in value.

Bob Gedert, Solid Waste Services Director, said a pilot composting program will help the City reach its Zero Waste goal of reducing waste by 90% by 2040.

"About one-third of the materials discarded in Austin are suitable to be composted," said Gedert. "By separating out compostables from the waste stream, there should be less trash going to area landfills."

Both One Green Step and The Green30 Challenge are ways the Solid Waste Services Department is trying to meet the City of Austin's Zero Waste Goal of reducing the amount of waste sent to area landfills by 90% by the year 2040.



L to R: Richard Garriott, Mayor Pro Tem Mike Martinez, Mayor Lee Leffingwell, City Council Member Laura Morrison and Solid Waste Services Director Bob Gedert