

## Waste & Recycling News

# Editorial: Zero waste's dollars need to make sense

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The Ohio State Buckeyes are one of only two undefeated teams remaining in big-time college football. Fans know, however, that there is a big asterisk beside this season at OSU. The Buckeyes are [ineligible](#) for postseason play.

Another team having a sensational season is Ohio State's [sustainability department](#). As reporter Shawn Wright [reveals](#), at the Buckeyes' Nov. 3 home game against Illinois, with 105,311 fans in attendance, Ohio Stadium's game-day waste diversion rate was an astonishing 98.2%.

But to get there, Ohio State had to pay.

Switching to compostable and recyclable products: about \$30,000. Infrastructure changes such as new containers and signage: \$50,000. Workers to monitor fans' trash: \$49,000.

Total price? \$129,000. And it would have been a lot more had the university not used the free labor of prison inmates in the sorting of recyclables.

There's a lesson here.

The zero waste movement, while crucial to educating the public and helping the very future of our planet, should not turn into a blind race to zero.

Businesses, sports venues, retailers or whoever it is trying to "zero out," needs to be sustainable *and* smart. Enduring inefficiencies, diminishing returns and labor costs to squeeze out a few more percentage points is just as much a waste as landfilling a truck of aluminum cans. Let's not divert common sense, too.

We need zero waste programs that hit a sweet spot of optimal cost vs. benefit.

We don't know enough about Ohio State's program and costs to criticize it with any certainty. Perhaps that 98.2% success cost just a little more than an 80% rate. But we wonder if a lower, yet still sustainable, diversion rate would have come with significant savings that could have been used for other green programs or improved recycling elsewhere on campus.

So for now we'll call it 98.2%\*

Yes, with an asterisk.