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Greening of the Pepsi Center

When managers at the Pepsi Center took a serious look at their environmental efforts, they learned what Kermit the Frog could have told them: It's not easy being green.

From thousands of incandescent light bulbs to hundreds of overly generous toilets, they found plenty of wasted energy and missed opportunities during a study last summer at the 8-year-old arena.

Since then, the arena has launched an ambitious green campaign, buying wind energy, boosting recycling and even hiring a helicopter to detect heat loss with an infrared monitor.

"We want to become a climate leader," said Dave Jolette, vice president of sports-venue operations for Kroenke Sports. "We're looking at everything. "

Energy efficiency and recycling at big events aren't easy goals, said Charlotte Pitt, program manager for Denver Recycles.

"You've got an audience that's distracted," Pitt said. "They're there for the game or the concert and often are enjoying a couple of cocktails, so environmental awareness is not necessarily the first thing on their minds."

For the most part, the city's arenas and theaters have practiced recycling behind the scenes for years, but higher-profile efforts are catching on as public concern grows over global warming and energy efficiency.

Last summer, a solar panel was installed at Coors Field to power the scoreboard.

This week, the Pepsi Center will become the first arena in the country to commit to offsetting 100 percent of its electricity demands through purchases of wind power.

In the coming months, all of the facilities hosting the Democratic National Convention will be scrutinized for everything from the recyclable nature of plastic beer cups to the types of cleaning supplies used by cleanup crews.

"One of our goals is to lead by example," said Michele Weingarden, director of Greenprint Denver, the city's overarching environmental initiative.

Among other efforts in advance of the DNC, the city recently replaced 207 toilets and 105 urinals with low-flow models in the original 1989 portion of the convention center and is replacing outside grass with xeriscape plants, she said.

In an effort to improve its energy efficiency, the Pepsi Center sought guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We've reduced energy consumption from 13.6 million kilowatts consumed in the first year of operation to 10.9 million kilowatts last year," Jolette said.

Managers now select recycled-paper nacho trays and office supplies from a list of green vendors, and cleaning crews sort the trash after Nuggets and Avalanche games for recyclables. The arena also replaced thousands of incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs.

"Easily 80 percent of the things we're doing saves money," Jolette said, "and that 20 percent . . . well, it helps us sleep at night."