



## **Five convention centers for more sustainable events in Canada**

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A recent survey conducted by Promoleaf and CensusWide revealed that a majority of conference attendees want event organizers to incorporate sustainable practices into their planning. This is especially true of the younger generation (under 34), which means that event planners and venues are likely to feel more pressure to adopt sustainable practices in the future.

We addressed what event planners can do to make their events greener in two previous articles on this blog (How to reduce the environmental impact of your events, Part 1—travel and transportation, and Part 2—energy and F&B). We also showcased five convention centers in the USA that have taken steps to ensure their operations become more environmentally friendly.

With totm exposition being based in Montréal, it's time to look at what convention centers in Canada have been up to when it comes to sustainability. In this article, we will focus on five of them and highlight their efforts in terms of durability.

### **Edmonton Convention Centre**

## A few facts about the Center

The Edmonton Convention Centre provides 150,000 sq. ft. of space on three levels for events and meetings. The Pedway Level features Hall D (23,600 sq. ft. of space) and the 4,000 sq. ft. Riverview Room. The Assembly Level (80,000 sq. ft. of space) includes three main banquet halls and exhibit rooms, which can be expanded into one open space for more significant functions. Finally, the Meeting Level features 20 flexible meeting spaces.

## Sustainable initiatives

The Edmonton Convention Centre has been committed to reducing its own environmental impact. To take hosting sustainable events one step further, the Centre launched its Responsible Events Program in 2019. The Centre provides event organizers with a toolkit to help them plan greener events.

The Centre itself focuses on the following improvement areas.

Becoming more energy-efficient by sourcing a large part of its energy from Canadian renewable sources, the Centre is committed to reducing its energy consumption in the long term. Ongoing LED retrofit upgrades are made to reduce energy consumption. Organizers are also encouraged to do their part, for example, by turning projectors off when not in use.

## Reducing waste

The Centre's waste management program includes compost, recycling, paper, and waste bins located in all areas. In addition, they provide free waste audits to event planners interested in minimizing the waste generated at their events.

In 2019, 270,245 pounds of waste were composted. This compost is used as fertilizer to farm Alberta fields. Overall, 67% of the Centre's waste (i.e., 390,474 pounds, the equivalent of 124 compact cars) is diverted from landfills.

The Centre has selected reusable flatware, dinnerware, napkins, and compostable cups. In addition, bulk coffee and water stations are available, and they promote the use of reusable and recyclable exhibit materials.

## Developing a sustainable permaculture

To contribute to Edmonton's urban biodiversity, the Centre has installed an indigenous medicine wheel garden on the rooftop of the Riverview Room, an herb and vegetable garden, and a monarch butterfly preservation garden.

In 2016, a hive of 8,000 urban bees was set up on the southeast corner of the Centre. The beehive produced over 20 pounds of honey in 2019, used for the Centre's kitchen needs.

Inside the venue, hundreds of plants absorb 4,120 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> each year, and a sustainable living wall is located on the Pedway level.

## Reducing greenhouse gas

Through its 2020–2035 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan, the Edmonton Convention Centre has committed to implementing operational and behavioral changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15% by 2025 and 30% by 2035 (from 2018 levels).

During events, a no-idling policy is in place. In addition, to offset a specific event’s carbon footprint, the Centre is committed to matching the event organizer’s carbon offsetting contribution up to 20 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

#### Being part of the community

Leftover food is donated through a partnership with Edmonton’s Food Bank’s Second Helping Program. In 2019, this donation represented 5,084 pounds (4,243 meals). The Centre also participates in the River Valley annual clean-up.

#### Promoting local food

The Centre works with local producers and growers within 100 miles of Edmonton, and 45% of their culinary purchases are made through local partnerships.

The Centre estimates that, by sourcing from local growers, they reinvest more than \$750,000 into Edmonton’s economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated from food production and transportation.

#### Promoting mass and/or green transportation

The Centre is close to several bus stops and a light rail traffic station. Guests are encouraged to walk, as the Centre is close to downtown Edmonton and attached to Edmonton Pedway.

#### Awards & certifications

The Centre is one of only five Canadian venues certified to ASTM standards and was the first conference venue in Canada to receive Green Key level five certification. The facility is also a certified Climate Smart business.

### **Palais des congrès de Montréal**

#### A few facts about the Center

The Palais houses 508,756 sq. ft. of floor space, spread over seven floors and 113 multipurpose rental spaces (meeting rooms, ballrooms, reception halls, gala rooms, VIP lounges, exhibition halls—including one of the largest column-free exhibition halls in Canada—, and outdoor terraces).

#### Sustainable initiatives

The Palais has put a lot of effort into becoming a sustainable venue, and they also offer tools to help event planners, exhibitors, and visitors be part of that effort.

The Palais focuses on three main areas.

#### Reducing waste

The Palais has made recycling a priority and provides facilities for collecting recyclable waste at all times, including during conferences and special events. In addition, organic waste collection is included when event planners choose the Palais' partner, Capital Traiteur, for their catering needs.

#### Reducing greenhouse gas

The Palais is among the first convention centers to operate a carbon-neutral building in the Americas. GHG emissions from the building's energy use are offset by contributing to tree planting efforts at Université Laval's Montmorency Forest, the world's largest university teaching and research forest.

In collaboration with Planetair, a leader in climate change awareness and GHG offsets, the Palais has developed an innovative carbon offset program for event organizers and participants called Palais Boréal. This initiative aims to help event planners organize carbon-neutral events by minimizing GHG emissions throughout the event life cycle and offsetting GHG emissions whenever these emissions can't be reduced.

The Palais is also dedicated to offsetting GHG emissions from their business development activities (mainly travel) through the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi's Carbone boréal program, a tree-planting offset program.

#### Promoting urban agriculture

The Palais is also the site of the Urban Agriculture Lab, an initiative led by AU/LAB, a laboratory for research, innovation, and intervention in urban agriculture associated with the Institut des sciences de l'environnement of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM). This makes the Palais the main showcase for experimentation and promotion of urban agriculture technologies and techniques in Québec.

The Urban Agriculture Lab has four main components:

- Culti-VERT, which experiments on extensive green roofs and container gardening
- Two pollinating beehives that can house up to 50,000 bees
- VERTical: an urban vertical scaffold farming project
- Urban vines: an urban rooftop vineyard
- Awards & certifications

Over the years, the Palais has collected many accolades for its green efforts. These include a Silver certification awarded by Boma Best national green building certification program, a Gold-level certification for quality and management performance granted by the International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC), and a certification awarded by iCompli Sustainability that recognizes Montréal and the Palais as leading destinations for environmentally responsible events.

### **Niagara Falls Convention Centre**

## A few facts about the Center

The Centre offers 300,000 sq. ft. of configurable space. This includes three exhibit halls for a total of 82,000 sq. ft. with retractable walls, two ballrooms (the 17,000 sq. ft. Peller Estates Ballroom can be configured in eight different ways), and 13 meeting rooms, as well as a 4,974 sq. ft. lounge and pre-function areas (20,000 sq. ft. of usable space).

## Sustainable initiatives

The Centre was built with sustainability in mind, using locally sourced and recycled construction materials. This contributed to the local economy while reducing air pollution associated with transportation. But the Centre is continuously working on improving its global impact on the environment and focuses its green efforts on six different areas.

### Becoming more energy-efficient

The Centre aims for 40% energy savings by using advanced technical systems that allow for high energy use performance. Energy-saving targets have been set, and consumption is regularly monitored.

The general layout maximizes natural light by favoring floor-to-ceiling windows whenever possible. In addition, overall energy performance has been achieved by installing efficient exterior wall and roof insulation, heat recovery units, and a high-efficiency HVAC system.

All mechanical equipment is CFCs and HCFCs free.

### Reducing waste

All materials leftover from events organized on-site or generated internally are separated into three streams, recycling, organics, and landfill waste.

Surplus food is either repurposed or donated to a local soup kitchen.

The Centre also encourages paperless practices.

### Saving water

A 42% reduction in water consumption has been achieved by installing water-conserving plumbing fixtures. In addition, a stormwater management system has been installed and controls discharge, making sure run-off is minimized and water quality is protected.

### Improving air quality

Green cleaning practices include the use of ozonated and deionized water. This helps maintain good air quality. In addition, whenever possible, low-emitting materials have been selected for paints, coatings, adhesives, and sealants.

The entire building has also been fitted with demand control ventilation and carbon dioxide sensors.

### Promoting local food

The kitchen sources local and seasonal ingredients as much as possible, therefore reducing the emissions generated by long-distance transportation.

Promoting mass and/or green transportation

The Centre encourages greener transportation means, such as walking, cycling, or public transit.

Awards & certifications

The Centre has achieved a Silver Level LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification.

## **Metro Toronto Convention Centre**

A few facts about the Center

The Metro Toronto Convention Centre is Canada's largest convention facility covering over 2 million square feet. It includes seven exhibition halls (442,000 sq. ft.), 77 meeting rooms (129,900 sq. ft.), two ballrooms (78,000 sq. ft.), and a 1,232-seat theater.

Sustainable initiatives

Event planners are strongly encouraged to take part in the Centre's sustainability efforts by reducing the carbon footprint of their events. Possible strategies include recycling, using nontoxic green cleaning products, donating leftover items/food, using green electricity, and choosing local food offerings.

The Centre itself focuses on the following strategies.

Becoming more energy-efficient

The South Building has been fitted with a seven-acre green roof, which reduces energy consumption and cooling costs. In addition, LED lighting has been incorporated in most parts of the North Building, which helps save 565,852.20 kW-hr of electricity per year.

The MTCC offers clean power to its clients with Bullfrog Power and provides planners with the ability to offset all greenhouse gas emissions created by their event by purchasing renewable energy. Bullfrog ensures that for every kWh of electricity used, a kWh of pollution-free, renewable source is put back into the grid.

The facility is also on Enwave Energy's Deep Lake Water Cooling system, which uses cold water extracted from Lake Ontario to cool the South Building allowing for reductions in GHG emissions & electrical consumption.

Reducing waste

Each year, 90% of the waste produced on-site is diverted from landfills. In 2018, the Centre diverted or recycled 4.4 million pounds of waste (equivalent in weight to 1,000 cars).

Improving air quality

The facility has a no-idling policy for all vehicles in parking lots and those carrying exhibitor materials. Instead of waiting at the marshaling yard, exhibitors schedule a time to deliver materials. This is done in

partnership with Voyage Control and helps reduce traffic and carbon monoxide emissions in the local area.

#### Being part of the community

Since 2014, the Centre has donated over 340,000 meals to food rescue organizations in Toronto. Leftover items are also donated to various local charities.

#### Promoting local food

The roof of the South Building is home to six beehives (50,000 bees each). This produces honey for the Centre's kitchen needs and supports the preservation of essential pollinators.

The Centre purchases approximately 80% of wine and 65% of all food and beverage items through local farms and businesses. They also encourage their clients to choose local food offerings.

#### Awards & certifications

The Metro Toronto Convention Centre has been awarded multiple awards and certifications over the years. Among these, and starting in 2006, they received a BOMA GO Green designation, awarded for being a commercial building showing environmental leadership and best practices. They also received a Sustainable Tourism Award from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) in 2012. In 2014, the South Building was certified LEED® Gold Facility for Existing Buildings by the Canadian Green Building Council (CaGBC).

### **Vancouver Convention Centre**

#### A few facts about the Center

With 466,500 sq. ft. of pre-function, meeting, exhibition, and ballroom space, the facility can host multiple simultaneous events and large single events with upwards of 16,000 delegates.

#### Sustainable initiatives

- The Vancouver Convention Centre is committed to sustainability, from the facility's design to everyday green practices.
- The Centre also encourages event planners to do their part and publishes toolkits and checklists to help them organize and hold sustainable meetings and events.
- The efforts of the Centre are focused on six different areas.
- Becoming more energy-efficient

Reducing overall energy consumption is one of the main targets of the Centre's sustainability plan. To ensure consumption is kept under control, it's measured and monitored throughout the facility, with carbon emissions calculated quarterly.

A seawater heating and cooling system has been implemented to take advantage of the adjacent seawater by producing cooling for the building during warmer months and heating in cooler months.

The West Building hosts a six-acre living roof (the largest in Canada and the largest non-industrial living roof in North America) that features more than 400,000 indigenous plants and grasses. This roof is designed to act as an insulator.

Natural light and ventilation are maximized throughout the facility. General building lighting is controlled by daylight and occupancy sensors. The HVAC system is also programmed to match activity levels in the buildings. Finally, low-flow fixtures are used in both buildings as well as Green Seal™ and EcoLogo™ certified paper products, soaps, and cleaners.

#### Reducing waste

The Centre diverts around 75% of the total volume of waste generated, which represents over 2.2 million pounds of materials annually. On average, 97,000 pounds of organic waste are recycled each month.

They avoid buying prepackaged canned goods, utilize cutlery, china, glass, and cloth napkins, and serve nearly all condiments in bulk or reusable containers.

#### Saving water

The Centre operates a blackwater treatment plant that recycles all water consumed by the facility, reusing it for toilet flushing and rooftop irrigation during warmer weather.

Staff and attendees are also encouraged to adhere to water conservation best practices.

#### Improving air quality

The measures include an anti-idling policy, smoking policies (no smoking allowed within 25 feet of any door or window), promotion of alternative transportation, and managing volatile organic compounds and hazardous air pollutants.

#### Promoting local food

The Centre's "scratch" kitchen uses primarily fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients. Four beehives have been installed on the living roof, and the bees supply honey for the Centre's kitchen while helping pollinate the plants and grasses.

Promoting and using locally grown products means less energy consumption for transportation.

#### Committing to sustainable purchasing

Whenever possible, the Centre prioritizes purchasing regional, organic, and sustainable materials and chooses suppliers who consider their environmental impact.

#### Awards & certifications

The Vancouver Convention Centre has earned numerous awards and certifications over the years, starting with the PCMA Environmental Leadership Award in 2010.

Most notably, the Centre was awarded LEED® Platinum certification for New Construction in 2010, and in 2017 the West Building was awarded LEED® Platinum certification for Existing Buildings: Operations



and Maintenance. This makes the Centre the first double LEED® Platinum convention center in the world.

### **In conclusion**

Canada is often viewed as a prime destination for nature tourism due to its large territory and comparatively small population (11 people per mi<sup>2</sup>). Indeed, the expanse of Canada's natural beauty, from mountains and glaciers to secluded lakes and forests, is almost unparalleled.

But as we know, this diversity and beauty are at risk from environmental threats. A substantial majority of Canadians are highly concerned about environmental issues and aware that they must do their part.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that this translates into the events industry and the efforts that venues now put in lowering their impact on the environment mainly through the reduction of waste and increased energy efficiency.

At totm exposition, we want to do our part, and we can help you make your tradeshow booths greener. Contact us if you have a project you would like to discuss!

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