



OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Seattle University

In the past three years, Seattle University has rolled out programs to ensure sustainability in the products it purchases and the investments it makes, but those are just the latest strategies in its pursuit of environmental stewardship that dates back three decades.

The campus has kept its grounds pesticide free and organic since the mid 1980s, and later had them designated a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. Throughout the 2000s, it followed that up by creating edible gardens for the surrounding community and local food banks, instituting waste reduction, recovery and composting efforts, electrifying a third of its campus fleet and introducing plant-based meal options.

The efforts stem from its Jesuit and Catholic charter, said University President Eduardo Peñalver.

“The existential threat that is climate change is one of the great challenges we face as a society,” Peñalver said. “We can no longer responsibly talk about it as a looming threat — its impacts are evident all around us. Seattle University is committed to caring for our common home.”

What strategies has the university established to mitigate energy, water or environmental risks? The goal in SU’s initial Climate Action Plan was to reduce emissions by at least 12% by 2020 and 51% by 2035 from the baseline year 2009. Through investments in new campus infrastructure, conservation efforts, waste reduction and diversion, and the purchasing of offsets, Seattle University has been carbon neutral since 2021 for emissions from owned or controlled sources and indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy. New construction on campus is built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold criteria. Five buildings on campus have attained LEED Gold certification. ... In 2021 Seattle University opened its newest building, the Sinegal Center for Science and Engineering. The building is fossil fuel free with all high efficiency all electric HVAC systems.



YOSEF KALINKO

Aaron Sundal, left, and Erik Vandersluys pour food waste from Cherry Street Market into the compact track loader before it is then added to the compost mixing machine at Seattle University’s composting yard.

A closer look

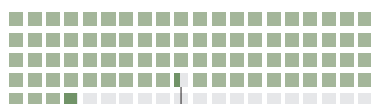
Top executive: Eduardo Peñalver

Headquarters: Seattle

Washington employees: 1,400

Selected sustainability stats:

83.87: Seattle University’s score on the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STAR) report in 2024, created and administered by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. It ranked 10th in the nation.



83.87 Scored 69.41 in 2016

67%: Average annual waste diversion rate SU achieved between 2015-23.

How do you engage and motivate your employees to be environmental stewards? There is a broad understanding by campus members about the university’s strategic priorities and goals, including regular communication and updates about progress made. It is also a university strategic goal to comprehensively reimagine and revise our curriculum to ensure that we offer a curriculum that prepares our students to understand and engage with the interconnected and major global challenges of sustainability and climate change, racial injustice and widening economic inequity and rapid technological change and its attendant social and economic impacts.

What is the university’s advice to other organizations trying to reach the same goals? Before anything, make sustainability a strategic goal at your company. By naming what

matters to you and by committing focus, effort and resources to sustainability, you send an important message to your company’s internal and external community. Approach sustainability holistically and create a structure that can lead and support your sustainability vision, including leadership and stakeholders from across all areas of your company. Develop a baseline of your current practices and build an assessment process that will enable your company to track progress towards its sustainability vision and goals over time. Last, but not least, cross-pollinate experiences and ideas between peers in your sector and beyond. It’s stories of solutions, community impact and positive change that set an example and will inspire others to take action.

– Marissa Nall, associate editor