

# inPRACTICE / DOG PARKS: From Zero Thought to Zero Waste

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## Battery Park City // New York

When Ryan Torres, Battery Park City Authority (BPCA) assistant VP of Parks Operations, said, "We should compost the dog waste from the runs," at an all-staff meeting, everyone was taken aback, but nobody was skeptical.

The Authority is a New York State public benefit corporation with a green legacy. Battery Park City (BPC) is built on top of landfill material from construction of the World Trade Center and other buildings in Lower Manhattan. The city is home to one of the first LEED-certified high-rise buildings and the Authority operates its own composting facility.

"Our CEO B.J. Jones wants us to stay on the front edge environmentally," said Bruno Pomponio, BCPA vice president, Parks Operations. "He's open to innovative ideas and zero-waste practices."

Jones would like to have everyone interested in sustainability—top to bottom. So expanding community composting fit right into current goals.

After the initial shock and disbelief, the proposal that Torres made last summer started making sense to the staff. The staff spent a week collecting data to back up her idea, so she came to the table prepared.

This consisted of a weeklong study on how much average waste was generated on the park's three dog runs (75 pounds per day, or 3.5 tons per year), plus financials showing that the project was do-able. She got the greenlight to spearhead the pilot program, and she went about her initiative in a methodical manner. Kick-off was New York City's Climate Day, Sept. 26, 2019.

Torres was inspired by a smaller dog waste composting program at Brooklyn's Marta P. Johnson State Park. She succeeded in implementing her initiative thanks to positive collaborating data, a do-able plan and start-to-finish team approach. Another key factor: The parks department and community were already in a zero-waste mindset. The pilot will run for at least a year.

Dog waste from the runs is not composted with other BPC organics. The material is transported to the BPCA's composting site but processed separately, using two retrofitted Earth Cubes manufactured by Green Mountain Technologies. Each unit has a capacity of 1.4 cubic yards.

After six months, the recycling team is now filling a second cube. The first is full and the material is curing to become finished compost, which BPCA will test for pathogens before deciding how best to use the compost to improve the park's landscape soil. BPCA's Parks Operations staff is still working out details on optimum locations for use.

Torres said that the composting program is a daily team process. Staff maintains daily tasks, collects the pet waste and transfers it to the compost site. The team gave its input into creating the process and currently works to improve it. Every detail of the program

Currently the weight of the added carbon is one-third of the weight of the dog waste input into the cube. And the carbon source is a mix of cardboard and sawdust.

Newspapers from BPCA's offices are provided for pickup. The paper is cut into a handy size and provided to visiting pet owners. This recycles paper while supplying easily compostable carbon. Workers even contribute the cardboard toilet paper cores from bathrooms. Zero-waste is an all-encompassing state of mind at BPCA.

With the dog waste bin placed right next to the trash bin, it's easy for pet owners to toss in their dog's contributions. Workers have found very little trash contamination in the designated waste bin.

Coinciding with the program's opening, BPCA launched an education campaign that included news releases, website posts, signs and a video. The BPC dog owners association also helped with getting out the word on site.

Are the dog runs cleaner as a result? "We haven't measured it," Pomponio said, "But yes, we've observed more pickups."

Do dog owners like the idea? "We live in a diverse community that appreciates landfill diversion so we have lots of buy-in," he said. "Dog waste composting is not an exciting process, but we get lots more good remarks than snide comments."

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rose Seemann is the author of *The Pet Poo Pocket Guide: How to Safely Compost and Recycle Pet Waste*.