



# Fall 2019 - Spring 2020 Year-End Report

## WASTE WATCHERS

### Key Takeaways

Waste Watchers expanded programming by increasing student membership by ~50%, staffing over 150 hours of events (four times more than in 2018-2019), and collaborating with the Office of Sustainability and Bon Appetit in the Food Waste Reduction Campaign and Waste Interface Design Pilot.

### Introduction - Who We Are

Waste Watchers (WW) is a student-led initiative under the MIT Recycling and Materials Management Office focused on decreasing waste stream contamination and educating the MIT community on proper waste sorting practices. We work across campus with institute event planners to make events more sustainable, stationing student WW at the event's waste bins to educate event goers and minimize waste stream contamination. In addition, WW partners with other groups and projects across campus to promote sustainability at MIT.

### Progress Summary

#### *Accomplishments*

- Staffed 14 events with 168 WW hours worked
- Gave a talk at TEDxMIT: Operation Earth (link under *Outreach* section)
- Received the Bon Appetit Student Activist Grant
- Coordinated and staffed the Food Waste Reduction Campaign with Bon Appetit, MIT Dining, and the Office of Sustainability
- Staffed all MIT Cafes (Sloan, Koch, Stata) daily for one week as part of an effort to build foundational knowledge throughout the MIT community
- Collaborated with the Office of Sustainability, School of Architecture and Planning, and Climark on the Waste Interface Design Pilot

#### *Program Logistics*

- Selected and welcomed our incredible new Admin, Amulya Aluru, in January 2020
- Updated WW training slides to reflect the waste contract with MIT's new waste contractor, RTS
- Increased visibility by reaching out to on-campus event planners and presenting in panels and conversations across campus. Contacted Rebecca Tyler, of MIT Institute Events, to extend information about WW to MIT's extensive list of past and current event planners.

## Awards

- **Bon Appetit Student Activist Grant Recipient:** Waste Watchers was one of ten national recipients of the \$1000 BA grant. This grant was awarded to “student groups with compelling projects to improve food system sustainability.”

## Outreach

- **MIT Office of Sustainability (MITOS) - WW** partnered with MITOS on the *Food Waste Reduction Campaign* and the *Waste Interaction Design Pilot*. In addition, WW presented as a panelist in the MITOS Waste Forum.
- **TEDxMIT: Operation Earth - WW** presented at TEDxMIT on the issue of recycling contamination in the US, and how Waste Watchers is one of MIT’s responses to solving this global problem. ([https://youtu.be/w2xbv-yKl\\_M](https://youtu.be/w2xbv-yKl_M)). After our presentation, peers from other colleges/companies reached out to us on how to replicate the WW effort, and we created a detailed guide for distribution.
- **Bon Appetit Dining - WW** worked closely with Bon Appetit Dining Company on understanding and improving the waste streams in MIT Dining Halls. We worked with MITOS and Bon Appetit in running the *Food Waste Reduction Campaign*. Through this grant, we were able to expand Waste Watchers and increase membership by 50%, thereby allowing for new collaborations with event planners and more leadership opportunities for WW.
- **Sustainable Event Planning Working Group -** We collaborated with the Working Group to create a Sustainable Event Planning Guide that was shared with all event planners across campus.



## Program Improvements

- **Program Guide Development:** We developed and shared a guide that discusses how to start and grow a waste education group at a company, school, or community organization. We shared this document with individuals who requested support after the TEDxMIT talk.
- **Improved WW Internal Relations:** We ordered mugs for all active WW and started a monthly Town Hall Meeting for all members.
- **Business Cards:** We designed and ordered business cards to allow for easy networking at events across campus.
- **T-shirts:** Reordered shirts to meet increased demand as the number of WW grew ~50%.

## Events in 2019-2020

(14 events total; 168 hours worked)

Event	Event Planned By	# Hours	Selected Comments
MIT Career Fair (1400 attendees)	Career Fair Committee, CAPD	9.0	
Trashion (75 attendees)	UA Sustainability	3.0	
MIT Winterfest (1,000 attendees)	Institute Events	3.0	
First-Year Orientation Dinner	Office of the First Year (OFY)	2.0	The contamination levels at all subsequent meals were reported to be the lowest they've ever been during orientation.
Orientation Parents Lunch	OFY	6.0	
Climate Symposia	Energy Initiative	35.0	Staffed 4 events over the academic year.
2.009 Presentations	2.009 Faculty	15.0	
SA+P Luncheon	SA+P	1.5	
Winter Family Day	MIT Open Space Programming	8.0	
PKG Community Conversations: Health	PKG Center	4.0	
PKG Community Conversations: Climate	PKG Center	4.0	WW gave a short pitch about the group to all attendees.
Graduate Student Visit Day Events	Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL)	2.0	
Food Waste Reduction Campaign- Waste Audit	WW, Bon Appetit, MIT Dining, MITOS	15.0	Two waste audits, working directly with MIT undergrads. Many students mentioned that WW presence made them much more conscious of how much they were wasting.

Waste Interface Design Pilot	WW, MITOS, SA+P, Climark	61.0	Daily data collection and weekly waste audits.
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## Challenges Encountered

### *Spring 2020 Semester*

- Due to the COVID-19 national pandemic, MIT's Spring 2020 semester was transitioned to purely online and off-campus learning on Monday, March 16, 2020. Students were required to evacuate campus immediately and all events larger than ~150 attendees were immediately canceled. As one of the foundational goals of Waste Watchers is staffing various events to increase community knowledge, most of our operations were cut short.
- To continue maintaining the Waste Watcher community and efforts, admins and members are working remotely to begin planning new campaigns for the Fall 2020 semester and evaluating the past two semesters of work done. Through events like CPW\*, we hope to introduce incoming freshmen to the Waste Watcher initiative and expand the impact of our organization.

## Future Directions

### *Growth and Ongoing Collaborations*

- Redesign posters on waste receptacles across campus to promote accuracy and consistency.
- Develop a Sustainable Event Waste Sorting Guide to be a companion for the Sustainable Event Planning Guide.
- Staff the first dinner during First-Year Orientation, and present at one of the early orientation events about waste sorting at MIT.
- Expand the Waste Watcher Administrative Team to include an Event Logistics Coordinator.
- Continue to collaborate with MIT Dining and the MIT Office of Sustainability.
- Enable WW to pursue projects they feel passionate about.
- Designate different WW as point people for events they sign up for to promote leadership within the WW community.
- Continue to build community among WW through bonding events, town halls/open discussions, WW swag, etc.

**Thank you to our collaborators for helping make this year a success and thank you to our manager Ruth Davis for all her advice and support!**



**Department  
of Facilities**