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Published on June 24th, 2009

Wash. Prison Doubles as a Sustainable Learning Facility

by [Amanda Wills](#)

A prison in Aberdeen, Wash. looks a little different than the bleak landscape, dirty walls and lifeless structure that are standard throughout the U.S. The Stafford Creek facility has been revamped into a sustainable learning outlet for inmates.



At Stafford Creek, the goal is to reduce the amount of garbage the prison sends to landfills each year from 1,200 tons down to just 200.

Photo: Newslink.com

Instead of creating license plates, inmates are trained to better understand human impact on the environment. Once released, it is possible that many of these inmates will go on to work at recycling centers or plant nurseries if they harness their training.

The program is a part of the Sustainable Prisons Project, a joint venture between the Washington Department of Corrections and The Evergreen State College in Olympia.

Behind the prison is a greenhouse where inmates learn how to restore native plant species by dropping seeds into rows of plant-starter tubes. For Daniel Smith, who is currently incarcerated for running a meth lab, the experience has given him more than just a green thumb.

“I’ve really realized the damage that was caused by the chemicals and whatnot that I was playing with and whatnot when I was out there and I just feel I can use this to be a better person once I return to society,” [he tells OBP News](#).

But the greenhouse isn’t the only sustainable practice inmates are taking part in. The prison also recycles “everything they can down to the prison-issue shoes that inmates wear.”

The facility is also reducing its water and electricity use and has even created a composting system in which inmates chop up old lettuce for the giant worm bin. For many inmates, this is the start of a greener life.



Amanda Wills

Amanda Wills is the Assistant Editor of Earth911.com

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8 Comments



1.

Teresa

posted on June 24th, 2009 at 7:54 am

This program should be a prime example for other prisons across the country to rehabilitate prisoners to become willing participants in society, rather than merely confirmed outsiders. Why hasn't this approach been utilized before now? Exciting concept, for sure!



2.

[Lynn](#)

posted on June 24th, 2009 at 11:45 am

The correlation between access to nature and wellness / healing has been well described in other populations (for example, in children and in hospitals), so this prison model makes perfect sense. I hope follow-up is done to carefully document the successes so that other prison systems are motivated to adopt this approach.



3.

Billye

posted on June 24th, 2009 at 9:15 pm

I so welcome this initiative in our prisons. I have long thought that we should do away with license plates pressing and get prisoners involved in clearing landfills. Resulting materials from cleared landfills can then be turned into useful recycled materials for road, housing, etc. Hope the idea catches on and expands into a useful re-entry to society and a more eco-friendly use of materials.



4.

Mind the Gap

posted on June 24th, 2009 at 9:24 pm

This is so exciting. I am so impressed with the people at both the prison and the College who have taken on such a optimistic and large project. I worked as a mens prison guard for several years. It was so frustrating to see how many things that could be switched to make the prison experience positive to the prisoner & society rather than creating more of a problem personality. I know the prisoners were real psycho-bastards (as well as many of the employees). But why do we do have to do things so backward, wasting so much over time just out of mean-spiritedness and sloth. We need younger, more energetic people involved in our government systems.

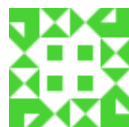


5.

Scotty

posted on June 24th, 2009 at 10:01 pm

They should serve vegan food in jail too.



6.

Garnet

posted on June 26th, 2009 at 4:57 am

Scotty,

Fabulous idea! If the people who are in jail received an an education in what aims must endure during their entire slaughter process, they may become more caring individuals. Let them learn how to become more compassionate and caring individuals. Something they may have never been introduced to while on the street. What a concept... people who adapt and respond welll to this should be moved into a more “peaceful” section of the jail also! Get the Planet back in balance.

7. [Real Food, Green Links for the Week of June 22 | Earth Eats - WFIU Public Radio](#)

posted on June 26th, 2009 at 7:09 am

[...] prison in Aberdeen, Washington is ditching manual labor, and instead teaching its inmates about sustainability. Included in the program is a focus on water and electricity reduction, hands-on-experience with a [...]

8. [Wash. Prison Doubles as a Sustainable Learning Facility](#)

posted on June 28th, 2009 at 3:21 pm

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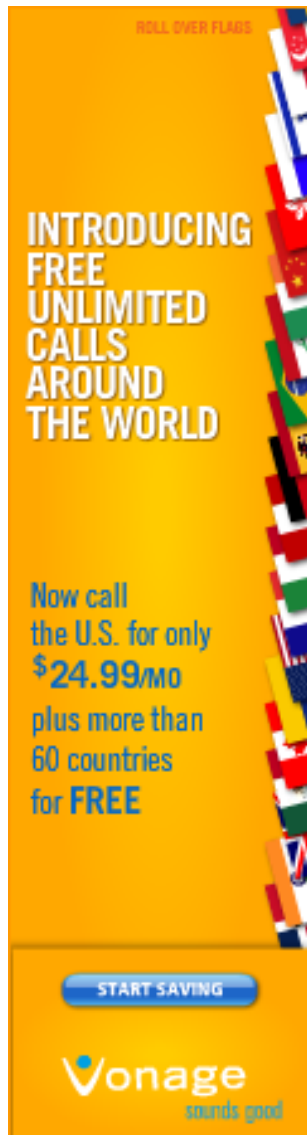
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