

UK Festivals To Clean Up Their Act

By Hannah Rossmorris

Firstly, let me point out that I am not very green. I own and run a jeep cherokee - not the most environmentally friendly car. Recently I've been feeling the effect of government legislation regarding the CO2 emissions from my Chelsea Tractor - my road tax, insurance and even parking fees in London have gone up. I am not alone, the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS), which was introduced in Jan 2005, is due to hit UK businesses in the same way. And this includes the event industry.

The EU ETS was introduced across Europe in order to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and combat the threat of climate change. It was designed as part of Europe's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol (the one that America still hasn't signed up to yet), which was the world first framework for international action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Kyoto agreement gives countries signed up to it (currently 150) binding targets and timetables for reducing emissions.

Phase 1 of the scheme is currently in place, and targets operators of large power plants and the like. So far non-energy related businesses haven't been effected. However, phase 2 of the scheme, which is due to be rolled out in 2008, will quite possibly effect other businesses. You may have noticed that some companies have picked up on the fact that they may be forced to reduce their emissions, and have adopted the scheme early. If I were cynical I would say that they were jumping on the band-wagon early in order to make themselves good - a bit of 'corporate social responsibility' or in other words 'PR'. In particular companies like BP and Marks and Spencer stand out here. But although the cynics amongst us may cry 'Spin', the fact that they are actually doing something to combat climate change ahead of schedule can only be a good thing.

A number of key players within the outdoor event industry have also been making changes to the way that they run events, with the aim of reducing their impact on the environment. Lift-share schemes and the use of public transport and shuttle bus services are commonly advertised at a number of festivals, primarily as a way of reducing congestion in areas surrounding events. The knock-on effect of promoting lift shares and public transport is to also reduce the biggest cause of CO2 emissions in the event industry - which is generated by the general public travelling to and from events.

But this is not the only area that causes CO2 emissions at events. A large amount of rubbish generated by festivals still finds itself in land-fill sites - which are also responsible for a great deal of the CO2 emitted in the UK. Many festivals (Glastonbury, The Big Chill, Reading & Leeds etc) also operate waste recycling schemes. Glastonbury goes so far as to have an entire part of their site run by alternative energy sources such as wind, gas and solar power.

It looks likely that phase 2 of the scheme could make this type of activity the norm, and festivals and events that don't try to reduce and manage their CO2 emissions may suffer financial penalties through the trading scheme. At the moment it is unclear whether local authorities will start imposing activities such as waste recycling and car-share schemes on festival organisers - but what is certain is that all local authorities have a real and tangible obligation now to ensure companies within their boroughs and wards

reduce CO2 emissions – if the government is (as they say they are) committed to reducing emissions by 60% by 2050 it is the local authorities that will be the enforcers of this. It is not too fanciful to think that in the next few years festival organisers will start to see licence conditions placed on them that force them to take reducing CO2 emissions seriously – as seriously as they have to take noise pollution now.

The good thing is that many UK festivals already understand the benefit to the environment and to their image that being 'green' brings. As public opinion shifts, a mainstream move towards sustainable lifestyles is inevitable. Clever promoters that opt into 'carbon neutral' schemes early will have the opportunity to create some great PR for their events. Promoters that wait until they are forced to comply will probably experience the opposite.

I also hope that promoters will adopt the carbon trading scheme because their consciences dictate that they have a duty to reduce their carbon footprint on the planet. As for me, I'm going to do my bit and sell the jeep this year.