

AFTERBURN REPORT 2001

Earth Guardian

The [Earth Guardians'](#) mission is to protect the playa from the ravages of human activity. The Earth Guardians are active year-round. In addition to working to spread the [Leave No Trace](#) message to their fellow citizens of Black Rock City, members of the Earth Guardians are involved in playa clean-up efforts as well as recreational-use monitoring efforts in coordination with the [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\)](#) and other Nevada environmental groups.

The Earth Guardian's dedication to the [Leave No Trace \(LNT\)](#) philosophy was nationally recognized in 2001. As part of the group of volunteers organized by the BLM working on restoration projects in the Black Rock National Conservation area, they received the 2001 "Making a Difference" National Volunteer Award at a special ceremony held May 23, 2001, at the offices of the Department of the Interior in Washington, DC.



Leave No Trace 2001. Photo: Karina O'Conner

Earth Guardians started preparation for Burning Man 2001 in the spring by revisiting the BM 2000 site to check for traces bubbling up after winter rains. Other trips to the playa during the summer focused on trail restoration in the mountains around the playa and clean-up of previous Burning Man sites. All work and no play isn't exactly in the Burning Man tradition, so starting with their annual Leave No Trace "train the trainer" backpacking weekend, Earth Guardians got a chance to spend some fun time on the playa. Another highlight of the summer camping season was the weekend trip to the microplayas at the northern end of the Black Rock desert, ending with a visit to the local hot springs to wash off playa dust.

As the 2001 event approached, the senior Earth Guardians kicked into high gear, planning the pavilion in center camp, compiling LNT messages for theme camp coordinators, working with the Black Rock Gazette, recording PSAs, and making cool Earth Guardians schwag. This year's schwag -- Matter Out Of Place (MOOP) bags, Earth Guardian bandanas and laminates -- offered volunteers a way to show their Earth Guardian pride.

At the event we were busy cleaning the trash fence, monitoring the hot springs around the Black Rock Desert, answering questions at the information desk, hosting performers at our stage, handing out MOOP bags to everyone with an eye for trash, and talking with theme camps to help them understand how they could reduce their traces. EG focused a lot on gathering information on how camps can easily and beautifully handle wastewater (see our website for more info).

A popular event this year was the nature walks. Despite the early morning start time (6:30 am), there were waiting lists for the nature walks on Thursday and Saturday. Due to the high demand, they'll be back next year with more walks covering local flora, fauna, and cultural history!



Hitting the trail. Photo: Karina O'Conner

While Burning Man 2001 was only the Earth Guardians' third year at the event, it was a transitional year. Many burners start planning for the next year's Burning Man soon after the event to keep the flame burning. While happy with the small amount of MOOP left this year, EG reassessed priorities, volunteer efforts, and needs during the event while the dust was still blowing. Future goals including building stronger Leave No Trace understanding within the Burning Man organization, bringing more to our volunteer community (including a new website and a better Earth Guardian home base in center camp), and providing better information to the larger community of participants at Burning Man.



Big changes are coming for the annual Leave No Trace training efforts. During the next year, several senior Earth Guardians and BM Senior Staff will be taking the NOLS LNT

Master Training. Once there are LNT Masters in house, it will be possible to organize and stage a "train the trainer" LNT class for Burning Man participants. The class is primarily focused on training folks who can then train others (e.g. volunteer coordinators) but the class is open to everyone.

Better communication and the idea that "comfort is key" are goals for keeping Earth Guardian guests and volunteers happy next year. To this end the Earth Guardian pavilion in center camp will be redesigned. Think more information (displays and a library on the Black Rock Desert and LNT techniques), more shade, a working LNT kitchen, and a lounge for Earth Guardian volunteers -- a happy place. In contrast to most Burning Man groups, Earth Guardians don't have a task but a goal to fulfill. Earth Guardians do whatever creative minds and active bodies can think of to get participants to Leave No Trace.



I think we're here... Photo: Karina O'Conner

In the past Earth Guardians tried to communicate and coordinate with every person participating and coming to Burning Man through every communication channel. In 2002 Earth Guardians will focus efforts on theme camps and other Burning Man volunteer groups.



Earth Guardian Camp of the Day contest will be expanded, and include some large-scale theme camps to be model Leave No Trace camps. (Email earthguardians@burningman.com if you're interested!) Earth Guardians hope to work closely with other BM departments to tackle tricky issues such as managing burn platforms. Folks were burning way too many nasty items (such as couches) this past year that sent clouds of toxic chemicals toward unsuspecting campers. Read the [article on toxic non-burnables](#) for more info on what not to burn at Burning Man.

Earth Guardians are also going to take advantage of our growing volunteer base of participants who know a lot about the Black Rock Desert environment and want to share their knowledge. EG are looking to grow a team of skilled scientists to research and teach others about our environs. Using things such as our Black Rock Desert nature walks --

both during the event and off-season -- will draw interest in Leave No Trace. It may sound corny, but once we all love and respect the desert, we will treat it better as a community and Leave No Trace. 🐾