

RECYCLING BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS



INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed to help your school and district implement a successful and sustainable recycling program. A school recycling program can be the best hands-on lesson for teaching students about waste reduction and conservation. It also raises broader community awareness about the importance of waste reduction and recycling since students bring the lessons learned home to their parents and siblings. Students also carry these habits on to their adult life. In addition, a successful recycling program can result in cost savings for the school or district and can be a point of pride for students, teachers, and parents!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
Getting Started.....	Page 2
Create a Recycling Plan.....	Page 3
Custodians and Teachers.....	Page 4
Containers and Labels.....	Page 5
Education and Outreach.....	Page 6
Evaluate Your Program.....	Page 7
Cost Savings.....	Page 7
Additional Ideas.....	Page 8
Accepted Recyclable Items.....	Pages 8-9
Non-Accepted Items.....	Page 10



THE BIG PICTURE

A successful school recycling program is almost always the result of a team effort between school administrators, teachers, custodial staff, and students. Establishing or improving a school recycling program doesn't have to be a complex or complicated process, but some forethought and planning can make a big difference in your success! The following steps lay out a simple approach that should lead to a successful recycling program in your school.

GETTING STARTED

STEP 1. IDENTIFY WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM AND FORM A RECYCLING COMMITTEE OR TEAM

The team should include someone from administration, custodial or maintenance, teachers, students, the kitchen or cafeteria, and the current waste hauler. While support from the school administrators is necessary, many successful school recycling programs are the result of one or two committed teachers who harness the enthusiasm of their students to build support and create a successful program.

SWACO has resources for teachers and students available that can assist with outreach, education, promotion, infrastructure, and best management practices.

1. **Designate a person to oversee the recycling committee and meetings.** This person should facilitate the entire process and communicate progress along the way!
2. **Commit to Continued Success.** The committee should continue meetings at the beginning of every new school year to ensure the ongoing success of the program.

STEP 2. IDENTIFY THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The benefits of recycling are numerous, including an improved environmental "footprint" for the school, a student experience that is in alignment with the lessons and values being taught in the classroom, and potential cost savings for the school. There are also potential challenges to implementing a new or improved recycling program, including time spent teaching staff and students what and how to recycle, potential changes to custodial staff responsibilities, and costs associated with recycling containers and signage. If your school or district cannot afford the cost of new or additional recycling containers and labels, explore the possibility of outside funding such as grant opportunities offered by SWACO and other organizations.

STEP 3. UNDERSTAND THE EXISTING CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

Work with the Director of Operations or another person in charge of managing your waste hauling contract to learn about the terms of the contract and if it provides recycling services. If it does not, explore the possibility of adding the service with your current contractor. If this is not possible, identify



when it expires so that recycling services can be included in any future quotes, bids, and contracts. SWACO can provide you with information about an existing School Consortium Contract, sample bid, contract language, and other resources.

CREATE A RECYCLING PLAN!

DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE, WORKABLE PLAN OF ACTION FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ONGOING SUCCESS

Items that should be included in the plan are:

1. **Work with custodial staff and identify who will be responsible** for the collection of classroom and other school recycling and trash containers and who will monitor the recycling and landfill dumpsters outside the building.
2. **Perform a school walk-through.** The school walk-through will help identify areas that need recycling containers and how many are needed. SWACO has created a worksheet for your use that may be downloaded from our School Recycling Resources webpage on our website: www.swaco.org. Once the walkthrough is complete, tally up the number and type of containers needed (typically smaller containers for classrooms and larger containers for common areas). SWACO can help you identify appropriate recycling containers that have been successful in other schools.
3. **Ensure the placement and size of recycling and landfill containers is the same school wide.** Always place recycling and landfill containers together to reduce contamination of the recyclables stream. Every time there is an opportunity to throw something away there should be an equally convenient opportunity to recycle.

Consistency throughout the building works best. Ideally, the recycling containers in all the classrooms are the same or look very similar, and if larger recycling containers are used in the cafeteria and other common areas of the building, they are also identical or very similar to one another. If this is not feasible, make sure that the signage/labels are the same throughout the building, regardless of differences in the containers. More information on containers and signage is provided later in this document.

4. **Identify those responsible for the ongoing education and outreach.** Develop a plan for each school year for how students and staff will receive ongoing recycling education & outreach. Is it part of a school assembly? Announcements over the intercom? Something that each teacher will cover with their class at the beginning of the school year. Part of the activities of an Environmental Club? Once you have a process/system in place it can be duplicated each year with minor tweaking, if necessary. To download SWACO resources that can help, please visit our School Recycling Resources webpage on our website: www.swaco.org.



5. **Plan to monitor and evaluate the program to ensure success year after year.** More on this on page 7!

INVOLVE YOUR CUSTODIANS & TEACHERS

While the input of your entire recycling team is important, the involvement of the custodial and teaching staff is essential to the successful implementation of a recycling program. They understand the day-to-day operation of a busy school building. The custodial staff are critical to the success of a recycling program and should be involved early in the process. While not complicated, the logistics of moving recyclable materials from the classrooms and other areas inside the building to the outdoor containers is an important detail to discuss when planning for your building.

1. Work with staff to ensure there is an understood system in place for collecting and moving materials to the outdoor dumpsters. If this is the first time implementing a recycling program, custodial staff will have an existing system for moving the trash from classrooms and other areas of the building to the outside trash dumpster. When implementing a recycling program, staff will need to pay more attention to the process since the recyclables and trash will be managed separately.
2. Typically, trash will be collected in trash bags, but recyclables should be kept loose for papers in the classroom. Paper-only collection containers do not need a liner. This is a cost-saving for the school! Bottles, cans, and other containers should be bagged but not knotted so that recyclable materials can be emptied out of the bag and into the outdoor dumpster. When recycling is sent to a recycling facility to be processed, trash bags can get caught in the machinery and cause delays or even shutdowns. Therefore, it is very important to talk to your collection contractor about the appropriate way to deposit recyclable materials in the outdoor recycling dumpster. Custodial staff needs to understand these requirements and the reasons why they are in place.

Tip: *If recyclable material is collected in bags, it is a best practice to collect recyclables in clear bags, left untied. When possible empty recyclable materials from the bags into the outdoor recycling dumpster so that items are deposited loose and are easy to process at the recycling facility. Clear bags allow the custodial staff to identify and remove unacceptable materials before placing the recyclables in the recycling dumpster, and if materials are left in the bag recycling workers can easily see that the bagged materials are recyclable and not trash.*

3. A successful recycling program results in the correct recyclable items being placed in the recycling containers and non-recyclable items being placed in the trash containers. The custodial staff will be in the best position to monitor the success of your program. Make sure that they know that they are an important part of the team and that their ongoing observations are appreciated!



SELECT CONTAINERS & USE SIMPLE LABELS

STEP 1. SELECT THE RIGHT CONTAINERS FOR RECYCLING & TRASH

After the school walk-through is complete and you have calculated the number of containers needed, evaluate what containers will best meet your needs. Consider the following:

1. Typically, two sizes of containers will be needed: small containers for classrooms and offices, larger containers for cafeterias, and common areas, and possibly next to printers, depending on their usage.
2. Use the universal color-coding system for containers: **blue for recycling containers**, and gray or black for landfill containers.
3. SWACO can help you identify recycling containers that have been successful in other schools.

STEP 2. LABEL RECYCLING AND LANDFILL CONTAINERS CLEARLY

Simple pictures or graphics work best with one or two-word descriptions. SWACO has created Recycle and Landfill labels for your use that may be downloaded at please visit our School Recycling Resources webpage on our website: www.swaco.org.



Schools may need different signage in different areas. Consider the above Recycle and Landfill signage to ensure your recycling stream is kept clean:

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:





- Should containers located in classrooms and beside copier machines be labeled paper & cardboard only? If these are the only types of recyclables generated in these areas, it could simply be the signage.
- Should containers located in staff break areas have labels that include bottles, cans, paper, cardboard, and cartons? (All types of recyclable materials that could be generated in the area.)
- Should cafeteria recycling containers have labels for bottles, cans, and cartons only? If these are the only types of recyclable materials generated in the cafeteria, this could eliminate confusion among staff and students.
- If using small containers in the classroom, consider placing labels on the wall, closer to the students' eye level, to make it easier to see what goes in the recycling bin.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Ongoing education is an important part of a successful recycling program. Simple communication methods such as articles in newsletters, announcements and reminders on the intercom or school T.V. station, and email reminders to staff can help keep a program running smoothly. Each year the Recycling Committee should come up with a simple communication strategy that will be used to educate students and staff about the school recycling program. Teachers and students are great at coming up with creative ways to keep the staff and students educated and excited about the program! Here are some ideas:

1. Spending a few minutes at a school assembly to talk about the importance of recycling and what can and cannot be recycled in the school recycling program is a great way to emphasize the importance of the program to all the staff and students.
2. Is there an environmental club or video production class that can create a "how to" video about the recycling program?
3. Announcements during school athletic events are a great way to encourage your guests to recycle their beverage containers.

SWACO has also created education resources for these purposes. To download SWACO resources that can help, please visit our School Recycling Resources webpage on our website: www.swaco.org.

By frequently reminding staff and students how to recycle, what to recycle and why it is important, you can begin to cultivate the change in behavior required to have a successful recycling program.

EVALUATE THE RECYCLING PROGRAM





The recycling program should be reviewed and evaluated every year. Here are some ideas about how to evaluate your program:

1. A conversation with your recycling hauler is a good place to start. Is the recyclable material clean and free of contaminants? Is it being placed in the recycling dumpster correctly? Has the list of materials that can be recycled changed from the previous year?
2. A survey can be conducted among faculty and students to determine if they correctly understand what can and can't be recycled and whether they have ideas to improve the program.
3. Does the custodial staff have any observations about the program and ideas for improvement?
4. Your contract with your recycling hauler may include a provision that requires them to report the amount of recyclables collected from your building. This information is not always available, but it's a great way to monitor the success of your program if your hauler can provide it.
5. A "waste sort" can be conducted to determine how much recyclable material is making its way into the landfill containers, and how much trash is ending up in the recycling containers. It's a good project for a science class or environmental club. SWACO has resources to help you conduct a waste sort.

LOOK FOR COST SAVINGS

Typically, a contract with a waste hauler for recycling and trash collection is charged at a "cost per pull," meaning how much they charge to have a truck come to your building and empty ("pull") the recycling and landfill dumpsters. Often it is cheaper to "pull" the recycling dumpster than the trash dumpster since the materials inside are commodities that will be sold once the recyclable material is processed. As a result, a successful recycling program can sometimes reduce your overall waste service costs due to a decrease in the number of trash dumpster "pulls" needed by diverting material into the recycling dumpster.

You may also be able to save your school money by recycling. You will need to right-size your program by determining the necessary frequency of service which will result in having dumpsters pulled only when they are full. Monitoring your trash and recycling dumpsters to reduce the number of pulls on the landfill dumpster (and increase the number of pulls on the recycling dumpster) can result in tangible savings for your school!

OTHER IDEAS & RECOMMENDATIONS





- It may be easier to start small and implement your recycling program in phases. For example, rather than rolling out a program for an entire school district it may be smarter to start with 2 or 3 schools, pilot and perfect your approach, and then move on to the remainder of the schools in the district. If implemented in phases, it could be easier to customize a program to meet your specific needs.
- Cafeterias are a location that generates a lot of bottles and cans. However, students often don't finish their drinks prior to the end of the lunch period. As a result, many schools will put a system in place to allow students to empty their beverage containers prior to being thrown in a recycling container. A five-gallon bucket is sometimes used for this purpose.
- Remember no recycling containers in bathrooms - there are no recyclable materials generated in bathrooms and placing a container there will only result in contamination of the recycling stream. This is probably the only exception to the rule about placing a recycling container everywhere that there is a trash container!
- Share your successes with the school staff & students, parents & the school board, particularly when starting or expanding your recycling program.
- Press releases, newsletter articles, social media, videos, and websites are great ways to share your commitment to recycling.

Additional resources are available to schools in Franklin County through SWACO.
Please visit our website at: www.swaco.org

GENERALLY **ACCEPTED** MATERIALS FOR RECYCLING

Recyclable material markets vary depending on location. The below lists of materials are generally accepted for recycling in Central Ohio. To verify accepted materials in your school recycling program, please be sure to check with your recycling hauler and/or the local Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to whom your hauler delivers collected recyclables for processing.

To learn more about how an MRF operates please visit: <https://www.rumpke.com/education/recycling-videos>

- **Paper and Cardboard:** Copy Paper, Notebook Paper, Clean Cardboard, Chip Board, Clean Pizza Boxes Newspaper, Ad Slicks, "Junk" mail, Magazines, Phone Books, and Brown Grocery bags. *Tip: Please be sure to break down all cardboard boxes. This saves space in the dumpster!*
- **Plastic Bottles and Jugs with caps, Tubs, Cups, and Lids:** All Plastic Bottles, Jugs, Caps, Tubs, Cups, and Lids are accepted. *Tip: Please empty containers and leave caps and labels on.*



- **Carton Containers without Straws & Lids:** Gable-Top Containers and/or Paperboard Containers containing items such as Milk, Juice, Egg Substitute Containers, Soups, Stocks, and Broths. Please rinse dirty containers and remove caps and straws. *Tip: Be sure to check with your hauler and /or MRF to verify if cartons are accepted for recycling in your school program.*
- **Metal Cans:** Aluminum Beverage Cans, Steel Food/Tin or Bi-metal Cans, Empty Aerosol Cans. Please rinse dirty containers. *Tip: Ensure aerosol cans are empty and remove tips and lids. Labels do not need to be removed.*
- **Glass Bottles and Jars with lids:** Clear, Brown, Green, and Blue Glass Bottles and Jars in which food and drink products are packaged. Please rinse dirty containers and leave lids and labels on.



GENERALLY **NOT ACCEPTED** MATERIALS FOR RECYCLING

Recyclable material markets vary depending on location. The below lists of materials are generally **NOT** accepted for recycling in Central Ohio. To verify accepted materials in your school recycling program, please be sure to



check with your recycling hauler and/or the local Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to whom your hauler delivers collected recyclables for processing.

- **Fiber Products:** Napkins, Tissues, Paper Towels, Paper Plates, Paper Cups, and Egg Cartons.
- **Plastics:** Specifically, 'Solo' Cups, Straws, Plastic Bags and Films, and Cutlery.
- **Polystyrene foam or "Styrofoam":** Plates, Cups, Packaging Materials, and Egg Cartons.
- **Metals:** Foil, Steel Scraps, Coat Hangers, and any other metal not in the shape of a container. *Tip: Scrap metal should be set aside and taken to a scrap yard for recycling. Scrap yards will often offer money for scrap metal items.*
- **Other items:** Drinking Glasses, Ceramics, Light Bulbs, and any other glass not in the shape of a bottle or jar, and Drink Pouches made of foil and plastic, Chip Bags, and Candy Wrappers.

