



LET'S RECYCLE RIGHT!®

A TOOLKIT FOR CREATING  
A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL  
RECYCLING PROGRAM



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# WHY RECYCLE AND WHY RECYCLE RIGHT



When done properly, **recycling is one of the most important actions** society can take to simultaneously improve: the environment, the economy and manufacturing, Recycling conserves water, energy and other natural resources, prevents waste from going into oceans, mitigates climate change, protects human health, creates jobs and helps businesses save money.





# SETTING UP FOR SUCCESSFUL RECYCLING

However, for recycling to work, it requires people to be able to recycle easily and *properly*.

It's critical that schools, businesses, organizations and cities set up their recycling programs using society-wide standards and consistent best practices to make it easy for people to recycle more and recycle *right*, wherever they might be.



Inconsistent looking bins and labels cause public confusion and result in 'garbage' being thrown in recycling bins. Confusion causes recycling to fail.





## TALK WITH YOUR RECYCLING HAULER

As a first step, talk with your recycling hauler to confirm the items that are recyclable and ask how they want you to collect the recyclables. Their answers will dictate how many bins you need and which standardized labels you will need to use.

1. Ask your recycling hauler:
  - What recyclables should we be collecting in our recycling bins?
  - How should the recyclables be collected? For instance, should paper, metal cans, plastic bottles and glass containers be collected in one bin, or do they need to be collected separately?
  - Can you (our recycling hauler) perform an audit of our recycling levels periodically? This service is often free of charge.



**TIP:** Choose recycling haulers whose revenue source is reliant only on recycling - they will be motivated to help your program succeed. In other words, try to avoid hiring recycling haulers that also own landfills.



# COLORS, BINS, LIDS AND PLACEMENT MATTER



Choose bins and lids that meet the recycling color standards, if possible:

- Blue bins are for recyclables.
- Green bins are for compostables.
- Black bins are for trash/landfill.



These style bins are great for cafeterias and hallways. The standardized labels are well displayed.



Choose lids that help influence student behavior such as this example for glass, cans, plastic recycling. The 4x9 standardized labels often fit these types of lids, as well.



Small blue desk recycling bins are great for classrooms and are sturdier than using cardboard boxes.

**TIP:** Instruct your custodial team to always keep your recycling bins, trash bins, and if you compost-- your compost bins side-by-side. Ideally, have the recycling bin on the left, the compost bin in the middle and the trash bin on the right.



# WE PARTNER WITH MAJOR BIN MANUFACTURERS

Recycle Across America is partnering with 12 leading [bin manufacturers](#) in North America who work with us to either have available sizing options for their bins or will directly kit the bins with the standardized labels before shipping.





# STANDARDIZED LABELS - RECYCLING/COMPOST

The society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins created by the nonprofit organization, Recycle Across America, are proven to be the #1 solution to help people recycle right! Statistics reveal a 50-240% increase in recycling levels and a dramatic decrease the amount of 'garbage' being thrown in recycling bins. The labels are created for many different sorting needs. Shown below is a collection of the 4x9 horizontal standardized labels:







## PROPERLY ADHERING THE LABELS



If you've purchased new plastic bins, ALWAYS allow the bins to *breathe (aka off-gas)* for a day or two before applying the labels. For new or old bins, clean the surface to remove oil, dust, dirt and other things that can interfere with the labels sticking properly -- and make sure the surface is dry. As an added assurance, wipe the surface of the bin or cart with rubbing alcohol and allow to dry before applying the labels.

The standardized labels should be applied in a place that will not be obstructed. If you have plastic liners in your bins, make sure the labels aren't put on a spot that could cause them to be covered by the excess plastic liner. A clear view of the labels from all angles is vital. Make sure the recycling bins and trash bins are always side-by-side and always with the recycling bin on the left and the trash bin on the right, for added consistency.



Ask your recycling hauler to paint the dumpsters the same color as your recycling bins and to add the standardized labels to the dumpsters. Also, add the "no plastic bags!" label to your recycling and compost dumpsters. This will help your custodial staff put the correct items in the correct dumpsters.



# BEST PRACTICES FOR LINING YOUR BINS

Most haulers **do not accept recyclables that are placed in plastic liners**, but if you must use plastic bags to line your bins follow these best practices:

- Use light blue or clear bags to line the recycling bins.
- Use compostable liners to line compost or food waste bins.
- Use black bags to line trash bins.

When placing recyclables in an outdoor dumpster, be sure your custodial staff knows to **empty the loose recyclables into the dumpster and throw the plastic liner in the trash**. To reduce excessive plastic waste and save money you can opt out of using liners.



Blue for Recycling



Green for Compost



Black for Trash





# ENGAGE YOUR CUSTODIAL SERVICES TEAM!

We cannot stress this enough ... **engage and educate your custodial staff about the recycling program!** The point of failure with recycling often happens when the staff isn't educated about the dos and don'ts, or they simply aren't engaged.

- Meet with the custodial staff and go through the toolkit together; this is a great way to cover a variety of topics.
- Or students may wish to do a presentation for custodians (and the cafeteria staff if appropriate).
- Repeat training often.

Set up the program so that it is easy for the custodial staff to follow using the best practices that we've listed in this toolkit. It will help your recycling program succeed and be worthwhile financially.





# INFORM YOUR FACILITY TEAM - NO PLASTIC BAGS

**Engage your school team to ensure they know the best practices and rules.**

To prevent plastic bags from going into the recycling dumpster, a **“no plastic bags!”** label should be displayed on custodial recycling carts and on recycling dumpsters. All ‘traditional’ consumer recyclables (such as cans, plastic bottles and cardboard) should be put in the recycling dumpster without being contained in plastic bags. Plastic bags jam and damage recycling processors’ equipment and can subsequently cause injuries to employees trying to unjam the machinery.



**ABSOLUTELY NO PLASTIC BAGS IN RECYCLING DUMPSTERS ... EVER!**



**Empty the recyclables into the recycling dumpster. If you have a plastic bag, put it in the trash or recycle it with a designated plastic bag recycler.**



# COMMUNICATING YOUR RECYCLING PROGRAM

## LET'S RECYCLE RIGHT!

These quick videos explain the importance of the standardized labels and they can easily be shared in staff meetings or in classrooms.

- This video explains why standardization is important and how schools may save money.
- A high school student created this quick video after his school installed the labels.
- Kristen Bell is featured in a public service announcement for RAA.
- This humorous and informative video delivers the standardization message.





## OTHER COMMUNICATION IDEAS

These quick videos explain the importance of the standardized labels, and they can easily be shared in staff meetings or in classrooms.

- This video explains [why standardization is important](#) and how schools may save money.
- A high school student created this [quick video](#) after his school installed the labels.
- [Kristen Bell](#) is featured in a public service announcement for RAA.
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**The Road Safety Analogy for Recycling**

 Recycle Across America



**Standardized Labels for Recycling Bins - A National Solution**

 Recycle Across America



## MEASURING SUCCESS AND SAVING MONEY

Contact your city, county and state waste management and government officials to ask if there are any financial incentives for your school to recycle and decrease your school's trash volumes. For example, in Minneapolis, MN the combined state, county and city tax on trash hauling is more than 75%. Meaning if you pay \$1000 for a *trash* dumpster and *trash* hauling, your bill will be more than \$1750 with tax included. But in Minneapolis, there are no taxes charged on *recycling* dumpsters, services or hauling of recyclables.



### MONITOR YOUR RECYCLING FOR MONEY

Ask your waste and recycling hauler to help evaluate your building's waste and recycling volumes. When requested, your hauler should be willing to help measure the volume of your trash and the volume of your recyclables. Ask them to provide a complete report including itemized fees for your landfill and separate fees and taxes specifically for your recycling. It is up to YOUR SCHOOL to request this audit and information if you intend to capture savings.

When possible:

1. Reduce the size of your landfill dumpsters.
2. Reduce the frequency of your landfill hauling.
3. Increase the size of your recycling dumpster.
4. Increase the frequency of your recycling hauling.

**TIP:** Every school should increase its recycling levels, recycling dumpster sizes, and frequency of hauling recyclables. This will lead to a decrease in landfill/trash dumpster services which can equate to thousands of dollars in savings for your school. Once you've done a baseline audit of your landfill/trash volumes versus your recycling volumes, look for every opportunity to decrease landfill waste and increase 'clean' recycling volumes so that you can capture the financial benefits of recycling.



# TIPS FOR CHOOSING COMPOSTABLE PRODUCTS

Composting your school's food waste and compostable products can save your school money by diverting significant amounts of material away from landfills while providing nutrient rich soil supplements to farmers.

Remember to always use 'well marked' 100% compostable, certified liners in your compost bins, and keep your compost bins conveniently placed alongside your recycling bins and trash bins in food service areas.

If you offer compostable dishware and serving-ware, make certain that each product is well marked as compostable.



**TIP:** Do not mix and match ... in other words do not offer some products that are compostable and other products that aren't compostable. Commit to fully compostable products or no compostable products - because having compostable products accidentally mixed in with traditional recyclables is very problematic for the recycling processors and having traditional plastics going into the compostables bin is equally problematic for the composter.







# THANKING YOUR DONOR

Companies and individuals make generous donations to help schools improve recycling. To celebrate this donation, *PLEASE* thank your donor.

## Social Media Posts

- Have students and adults take pictures of themselves putting labels on bins or posing with the bins they've labeled. Share the photos with RAA, and we will post them on Twitter and tag your donor and your school, or you may post and tag the donor and RAA.
- It is the responsibility of the school champion (representative) to obtain parental permission as needed. If you are unable to feature students in posts, please take photos of the labeled bins or perhaps a staff member will volunteer to be photographed.
- RAA has a parent permission slip that can be shared with families as needed. Please email [info@recycleacrossamerica.org](mailto:info@recycleacrossamerica.org) for a copy.

## Other Ideas

- Students may wish to create thank you cards, banners, or videos. We will be happy to share the donor's contact information if we have it available.

*Please send your thanks in a timely manner. If you are not going to install the labels right away, send out a quick tweet thanking your donor (we are happy to assist) and send photos later.*





# DO'S AND DON'TS CHEAT SHEET

## TOP SEVEN “TO DOS”:

- ❑ Consult with your recycling hauler to find out what exactly can and cannot go in your bins.
- ❑ Make sure your bins are properly color-coded and have proper lids.
- ❑ Place standardized labels on your bins and lids.
- ❑ Empty liquids out of containers. Provide a bin or bucket where liquids can be poured.
- ❑ Hang signage on walls behind cafeteria bins if the labels will be blocked when multiple students are sorting their recycling and trash.
- ❑ Properly adhere the labels to dumpsters.
- ❑ Empty your recyclables into the larger dumpster without plastic bags.
- ❑ Engage your custodial staff.
- ❑ Communicate your program.

## DON'T:

- ❑ Put plastic bags in the recycling bin.
- ❑ Place recycling bins far away from trash bins.
- ❑ Place labels on areas of the bin with uneven surfaces or that may be covered by liners.
- ❑ Place hazardous material, food, liquid, styrofoam, and other non-recyclables in your recycling stream.



Recycle Across America now has over seven million labels in use with brands such as...



contact us:

[info@recycleacrossamerica.org](mailto:info@recycleacrossamerica.org)

(855) 424-6522

links to more info:

video showcasing the importance of standardizations and the positive impact of the standardized labels

[recycling statistics](#)

[www.recycleacrossamerica.org](http://www.recycleacrossamerica.org)

The  
New York  
Times

"ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL FIXES  
TAKING ROOT TODAY"



"WORLD CHANGING SOLUTION"