

Starting and Maintaining a School Recycling Program in Salt Lake County

1. Establish a Recycling Team

The first step to developing a successful school recycling program is found in organizing and maintaining a recycling team. A recycling team is responsible for the coordination of all recycling initiatives and manages the who, what, when, and where of recycling in the school. The head of the recycling team is the recycling coordinator or main point of contact (POC). This position is responsible for keeping the short and long term goals of the program in mind and ensures the recycling program is running as efficiently as possible.

Important Considerations for the Recycling Team

There are four areas of focus the recycling team should utilize to develop their goals:

- ✓ **Markets:** Identifying what materials can be recycled in your area is essential for the creation of a successful recycling program.
- ✓ **Materials:** The most common materials collected in a school program include aluminum soda cans, plastic bottles and food containers, glass bottles, and paper (newspaper, mixed paper, fiberboard or chipboard, and/or cardboard). All of these materials, except glass, are recyclable in the single stream recycling programs offered through Salt Lake County's many waste haulers. Glass is recyclable, but would need to be sorted into separate containers and hauled under a separate contract.
- ✓ **Collection System:** Schools with existing recycling programs have attempted to make their recycling program collection match their current waste collection. This means providing similar sized bins in similar locations to make the transition as smooth as possible. The school's current waste hauler will provide a recycling dumpster and coordinate a pickup schedule with your school's administration and custodial staff. The recycling team, the administration, and the custodial staff will need to work together to determine how individual recycling bins are emptied into the recycling dumpster.
- ✓ **Education and Outreach:** Ensuring that the school faculty and student body are aware and supportive of the recycling effort is critical to the program's success. School

announcements at the launch of the program should be combined with outreach materials in the forms of recycling posters and signage clearly outlining what can and cannot be recycled in the new recycle bins.

2. Assess and Identify Program Supporters

One of the key elements for a successful recycling program is the level of support which it receives. Try to identify students, teachers, faculty, staff members and organizations that are dedicated to recycling and who will cheerlead for your program. These individuals and organizations will provide experience and insight. Their interest in your school's recycling objectives will make a remarkable difference in the success of your program.

3. Determine Scope and Assess Your Waste

Generally, starting small and then expanding your program once the basic components are in place is the best approach to starting from scratch. Trying to do too much at once becomes overwhelming quickly and prevents efficiency. Start by determining the scope of your recycling program and keep the scope focused. You can always expand the scope once you have mastered the basic tiers. Consider these following questions:

- ✓ **Which materials are most important to recycle?**
- ✓ **Which materials are easiest/most difficult to recycle?**
- ✓ **Should the recycling efforts be focused in the classroom, in the cafeteria, in the hallways, or do you want to attempt to cover everything from the start?**

After you have determined the scope of your program, your recycling team should determine the answer to this crucial question:

- ✓ **What will we recycle?**

It is important to know what type of potential recyclables your school generates and which ones are generated the most. To do this, it may be helpful to conduct a waste assessment in your school. If this approach is not possible you may be able to gather information from neighboring schools with existing recycling programs. When in doubt, stick to recycling the basics and avoid the specialty markets. Aluminum, paper, plastic, and cardboard recycling are good starting points.

4. Evaluate Options & Set Reduction Goals

After conducting a waste assessment, use the information to list, analyze, and choose appropriate waste reduction activities for your school. Consider holding a brainstorming session to identify potential waste prevention and recycling activities. List your most promising options and evaluate them in terms of your program's economic and operational limitations. When analyzing and selecting specific options, focus first on waste prevention as this will enable your school to eliminate waste at the source. Next, evaluate recycling options to better manage waste that cannot be prevented. Before collecting recyclable materials, be sure to identify markets for them. Finally, examine opportunities to support the purchase of recyclable and recycled content products by your school, school faculty, staff, and student body.

5. Outline the Role of the Recycling Coordinator and/or Team

The recycling team and or coordinator will be responsible for some or all of the following:

- ✓ **Overseeing collection**
- ✓ **Facilitating recycling and waste reduction efforts**
- ✓ **Acting as the liaison between the administration, faculty, staff, and student body**
- ✓ **Developing and distributing promotional and educational materials**
- ✓ **Monitoring program success**

6. Identify Collection Techniques

Collection methods can make or break your program. Running an efficient program is essential to producing the results you desire. When developing your program, keep the following in mind:

- ✓ **Maximize Space**

Will you be maximizing space for collecting recyclables? Identify the size and collection frequency of the recycling dumpster your school will receive. This will give you an idea of how much you can reasonably collect and avoid any overflow that will end up in the garbage. Throwing out even a small amount of collected recyclable material can be a major blow to the credibility of your recycling program. Questions of whether it is worth the school's time or effort will likely surface.

✓ **Consider Bin Size and Placement**

When considering containers, keep in mind that custodial staff have a practice already in place for emptying waste bins. Providing recycling bins of similar size and in similar locations will make collection less difficult and easier to use. By providing recycling containers that match the size of waste collection containers your school is emphasizing that recycling is as important as trash collection. Failure to provide sufficiently sized recycling containers or infrequent container emptying will cause recyclable materials to end up in the garbage.

✓ **Make Recycling a Constant Option**

Bin placement should not limit the option of recycling to certain areas of the school, but encourage the habit of recycling and help the long-term success of the program.

7. Build Support

Support from the following parties is critical to the development and maintenance of a successful program: school administration, faculty, staff, student body, and parents. Support is the key to low contamination and program success. Outreach can make or break a program!

For simplicity, break the school down into two groups – those that will easily recycle and those who need additional support. The audience for a beginning program should target and motivate those in the first group; these individuals usually value environmental causes and resource conservation. After you have successfully targeted a more amenable audience, consider marketing initiatives for the harder-to-reach audience. Understand that environmental messaging may not be the best approach to people who do not consider themselves avid recyclers. Guilt-based messages about the environment only appeal to people who are currently concerned about the environment. Instead, use incentives, both perceived and actual, for those who do not consider themselves avid recyclers to build the idea that recycling is part of your school's social norm. Lastly, if you have a diverse school, consider writing instructions in more than one language so that all parties are informed and educated.