How to Start and Sustain a School or Business Recycling Program

This info sheet has been designed with schools in mind, but applies just as well to the business environment. When reviewing information for an office environment, please apply same guidelines.

For more detailed information please check out these websites:

www.epa.gov/epaoswer "Steps for Starting a Waste Reduction Program"
www.ciwmb.ca.gov/gallery/wasteprev> Waste Prevention Clip Art
www.paperrecycles.org "A Guide to Recycling at School"; "A Guide to Recycling at Your Office"
www.plasticsresource.com "Plastics Recycling in Your School"
www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dshm/redrecy/index.htm "A School Waste Reduction, Reuse, Recycling, Composting & Buy Recycled Resource Book"
www.gogreeninitiative.org
www.kab.org

Step 1: Collect Information

- Conduct a quick audit of what types and amounts of recyclables are in the classrooms, staff offices, food service areas, gymnasium and library.
- What is best way to collect and separate for clean and easy recycling? For a successful program, recyclables must be separated, clean, without any trash or mixed material
- Start recycling what is most abundant, which will likely be paper or cardboard. Consider an aluminum collection program that you can bring to a local aluminum recycler and receive money directly.

Step 2: Where Will the Recyclables Go?

Contact your school's trash collector, be it a private business or city/county program to find out about recycling in your area. If no collection service is available, find out where the nearest drop-off/convenience center is and evaluate how the recyclables will get there. The NM Recycling Coalition has an online recycling directory that can help you find a contact for your area, go to www.recyclenewmexico.com.

- If the recyclables will be picked up, evaluate the costs and benefits of recycling, what effects this may have on your waste collection (e.g. reduced volume and reduced costs in trash collection), ask if they have a minimum weight or amount of recyclables before they will pick-up, ask specifically what kinds of paper and plastic they collect and how these items should be prepared for pick-up, ask what sort of containers are needed for them to work with when they collect and ask if they provide these, ask what are the most common contaminants, will the school need any additional containers or equipment for the pick-up of recyclables and ask if the school will be given collection quantity and quality updates. Other costs may include transport of material, facility maintenance/rental, storage area rental, insurance, utilities and labor wages.

- If there is no pick-up service in your area, you will need to first identify where the drop-off center is and who from the school can commit to take the recyclables to that site. An idea would be to locate a business or truck driver that regularly travels to that drop-off center or nearby and ask for their assistance.

Step 3: Design Your Program

First you will want to gain the support from your principal, school administrators and custodial staff. Present your research on what materials the school generates, talks you've had with your recycling collector, and how the program will benefit students, the school, the environment and the community.

- Select a program coordinator and a student team who will champion recycling. Encouraging student participation in the collection will help keep the materials clean and separated. Select a classroom or grade to train students on how to recycle at the start of each school year.
- How many containers will be needed? Smaller bins for paper and larger bins for plastic or aluminum. Bins should be located near trash containers and be clearly marked.
- Design how and when the recyclables will be collected and stored for pick-up. Paper recycling may have specific requirements to prevent fire hazards so check with your fire marshall, local recycler or building manager.
- Train your custodial staff to organize a good collection plan, the value of recycling and make sure they have proper equipment.

- Have students create their own signs on what goes in the recycling bins, increasing interest and ownership of the program. Signage should be placed at each recycling bin as well as throughout the school.

Step 4: Starting Your Recycling Collection

Smaller schools can begin recycling right away, but larger schools are recommended to start slowly with a few classrooms as a pilot program in order to learn what will work best on a larger scale. Plan a kick-off event that includes all members of the school and parents. Always remember to keep the students involved with monitoring of the bins and assistance with the collection of the recyclables. Put safety first. Glass should only be handled by adults.

Make sure education about recycling is coupled with the program throughout the school year. Invite your local recycler to attend a school assembly or speak with individual classrooms. Post information on the bulletin board, in the newsletter and website. Include recycling as part of the school orientation. Visit a local recycling facility. Discuss at staff meetings. Monitor the recycling bins regularly and create a reminder system about what can and cannot go into the bins.

If possible, track how much material was recycled. Look at the costs of the recycling program and evaluate if trash collection costs have been reduced. Ask students, teacher, custodial staff and your recycler about how they think the recycling program is working. Create awards for best of classroom recyclers, or even create a contest to see who can recycle the most.

Let your community know about your program in the local paper or news station. Look for awards opportunities that will bring recognition either on the local, state or national level to student and teacher leaders. In New Mexico, the New Mexico Recycling Coalition holds an awards ceremony every other year and includes a Best School Recycling Program. The National Recycling Coalition recognizes schools across the nation as well.

Good luck!

New Mexico
Recycling Coalition