

Recycling Case Studies

Rhodes School, River Grove, IL

This K-8 school of over 600 students has been actively recycling since 1990. They started their program small and it gradually grew over the years. According to the Director of the Technology and Recycling Program, Rhodes recycled over 21,000 lbs. of paper in 2007 alone. In the lunchroom, students and staff make sure they empty their drink containers which are then placed in the appropriate recycling bins. It's an easy process since their recycler doesn't require them to sort paper milk cartons from other plastic bottles and containers. Rhodes School has been recognized for their environmental stewardship by many organizations. They have also received the Illinois EPA Green Youth Award and the U.S. EPA Children's Environmental Health Excellence & Recognition Award in addition to many grants that have helped fund the expansion of their recycling programs.

The National Geographic Society made the following statement; "The Rhodes Recycling Program has been active since 1990. This award-winning recycling program goes beyond their school, impacting the entire community of River Grove, Illinois. Rhodes School has a modern, creative, and a sensible plan for recycling. They have advanced beyond basic recycling in their school to include materials such as milk cartons and plastic bags. They also take a supply-side approach by being a leader in source reduction. One example of this is their Schools Assisting Schools Program, where Rhodes has chosen to donate materials such as books, carts and computers, which they no longer need, to schools who can use them. The National Geographic Society, an organization whose mission is to increase global understanding and promote conservation of our planet through exploration, research, and education, is proud to join SeaWorld and Busch Gardens in recognizing Rhodes School with an Environmental Excellence Award."

Brookline School District, Brookline, MA

What started as a pilot program has encompassed all 10 schools (6,000 students) in Brookline and has tripled the amount of materials that are now being recycled in the schools. The lunchroom process of sorting their lunch waste has been enthusiastically met by the students. In the clearly marked line of recycling and trash containers, each piece of lunch waste is carefully sorted out. Students are responsible for emptying their milk cartons and drink containers into the "dump bucket" and then placing the containers in the proper recycling receptacle. The drink containers are co-mingled (milk cartons, aluminum, glass & plastic together) and sorted once they arrive at the local recycling facility. According to the Brookline Solid Waste Department, "The EPA has found that making paper from recycled material results in 74% less air pollution and 35% less water pollution than using virgin wood." Milk cartons are baled and sent to a processor for fiber recovery where they are used for making writing paper, paper towels and tissues.

Clark County, WA (Be Extreme, Recycle Campaign)

Clark County schools have been running SOS (Save our Organic Scraps), a milk carton recycling and organic waste program since 2005. The SOS program is now in 50 schools in the Vancouver, Evergreen and Camas School Districts. Student Monitors in the cafeteria during lunch encourage leadership and responsibility as they monitor the containers for contamination. Lunchroom waste is separated into organics, milk cartons, aluminum, plastic bottles and trash bins.

The average school produces enough milk cartons to fill a 60-gallon container every day. Leftover milk is dumped before the cartons are placed in the recycling bin. Most schools have anywhere between 100-500 milk cartons collected daily. The separation results in less than 10 percent waste in the lunchroom.

Since milk cartons are separated from the organics, they are picked up and transported to the recycling facility. At the recycling facility, empty milk cartons are crushed, shredded, baled and sent to a local paper mill for fiber recovery. Schools will then receive a rebate from the recycler. Having a local fiber recovery program nearby has been instrumental in maintaining the demand for empty milk cartons.

<http://www.clark.wa.gov/recycle/documents/SOS/SOS%20Programs/SOSleaflet.pdf>

King County, WA Green Schools Program

The Green Schools program is sponsored by the King County Solid Waste Division. Over nine districts with 200 schools have participated in this program. The program is structured into three levels with each level requiring a different set of criteria to be met. Instead of simply listing possible recycling practices, level one school criteria, along with hands-on assistance from a King County representative, provides specific guidance on how to set up and maintain an effective, long-lasting recycling program. In level one, schools also complete at least one paper reduction practice, one lunch waste reduction practice, and one practice involving durable products or bulk dispensers. Numerous waste prevention and recycling programs are sponsored, including milk carton recycling. In addition to providing grants for programs, the Solid Waste Division provides support and training curriculum for educating staff and students about recycling and waste reduction.

By completing level one of the Green Schools Program, schools and districts reduce garbage volumes, increase recycling and conserve natural resources. Many school participants reduce garbage disposal costs after improving their waste reduction and recycling practices.

