



Recycling drink boxes and milk cartons at school

Best practices for curbside systems



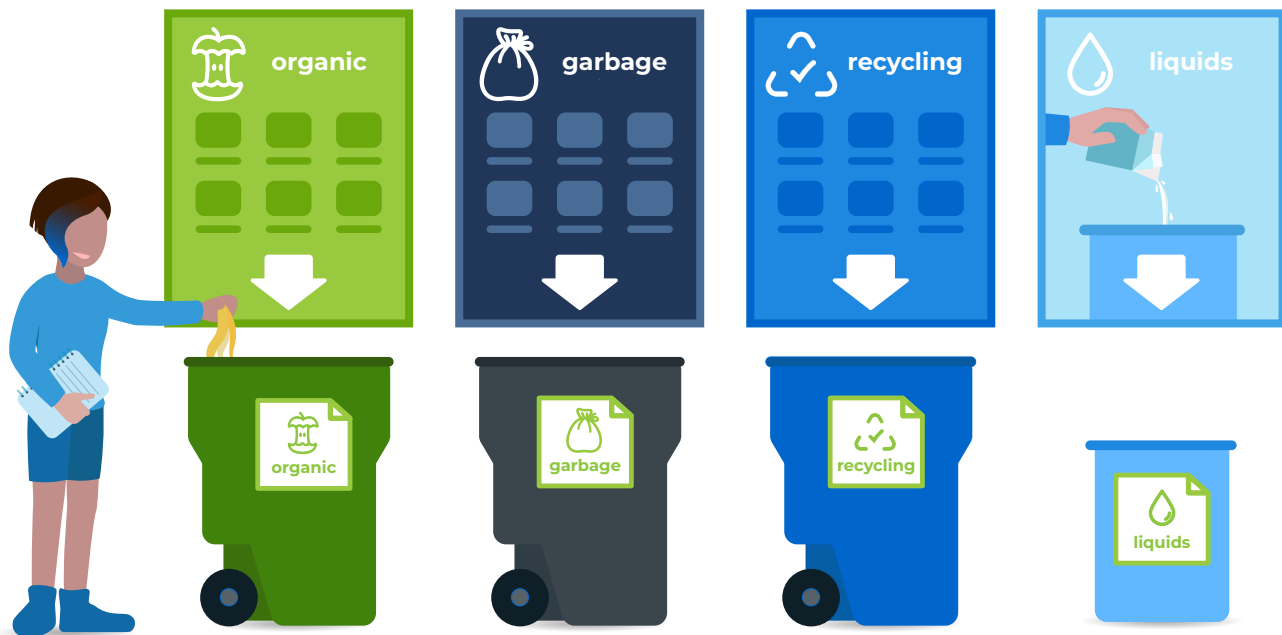
Recycling at School

Schools produce a lot of waste every day, especially at lunchtime. In fact, it is estimated that the average Canadian primary school produces 39,000 used milk and juice cartons each year¹.

When schools set up a strong recycling program, it ensures that items such as food and beverage cartons are recycled correctly. This, in turn, helps to conserve natural resources, save energy, and divert more materials from landfills, all while giving these items a new life!

When students and staff work collaboratively to create effective recycling systems at school, it benefits the environment while also providing opportunities for learning and student leadership.

In this guide, learn about some best practices to establishing a successful recycling program.



¹ Carton Council of Canada



Did you know ?

Through the recycling process, food and beverage cartons can be transformed into tissue, printing and writing paper, and even building materials. Learn more [here](#).



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Establishing a successful recycling program at school

Setting up a strong recycling program at school will help to reduce contamination in your recycling and garbage bins and divert waste from landfills. Check out these six tips for establishing a successful recycling program at your school.

1 Create an EcoTeam

At the core of a successful school-based recycling program is an active group of students and adults who help to educate others and organize weekly tasks. A range of school grades makes for a well-rounded team. By involving principals, teachers, parents, and custodial staff, students can be given the support they need to succeed.



Check it out!

Get Inspired with more strategies on how to build a strong and effective EcoTeam.

2 Ensure there is a recycling bin in every room

The easier it is for people to recycle, the more likely items will be sorted properly. Ensure that there are recycling bins in every room of your school, including classrooms and offices.



TIP!

Place larger recycling bins in communal areas of the school like printer/copy rooms and cafeterias.



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3 Pair garbage and recycling bins

The practice of placing a recycling bin next to every garbage bin and vice versa is referred to as bin pairing. Bin pairing increases the likelihood that waste will be put in the right place. If your school has a lunchroom or cafeteria, there should be a central waste management station set up. This may include recycling bins, garbage cans, compost receptacles (if applicable), and a bucket to collect any residual liquid.

Check out these great waste stations for inspiration:



Pairing waste receptacles with a bucket for residual liquid will ensure that items are sorted properly and that beverage containers are properly recycled.



Centre scolaire catholique Jeanne-Lajoie, pavillon élémentaire (CECCE) in Pembroke, ON has a one-stop waste station in their hallway with clear and colourful signage to instruct people about what goes where.

4 Create a system to manage any residual liquids

To properly recycle beverage containers, all liquid must be removed before they are placed in the recycling bin.

Classrooms that are equipped with a sink can make use of it. For those that don't have an accessible sink, and for high-traffic areas, a simple dump station can be created.



Did you know ?

The excess liquid in beverage containers can contaminate other items in the recycling bin and render them non-recyclable.



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How to create a successful dump station system

A dump station is an easy-to-use system that allows students to empty any leftover liquid from their recyclable drinking containers. Dump stations are often built with a bucket to collect liquids and a screen to capture any wrappers, straws, or food that gets tossed in too.

Step 1: Design and assemble your dump station

Example 1: A small, portable dump station

- Use a 5-gallon bucket.
- Place a strainer or mesh netting on the top of the bucket to capture any food, straws, or wrappers.

Advantage: These dump stations are simple to construct and easy for custodial staff to lift and empty.



Example 2: A large, advanced dump station

- Use a 33-gallon container.
- Install a spigot at the bottom of that container. The spigot will make it easier for the custodian to pour the residual liquids into a floor sink.
- Place the bucket on wheels for easy movability.

Advantage: These dump stations can hold a significant amount of liquid for larger schools and are easy to move and drain.





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Step 2: Create instructive signage

There are three simple steps to properly recycle beverage containers at your school: drink, empty, recycle. Create signage to share these instructions with your school community to ensure dump stations are being used correctly and containers are being disposed of properly.

Check out these great posters for inspiration:



TIP!

The most successful programs include students working at the dump stations to help facilitate the recycling and dumping of excess liquids. Recruit students from your EcoTeam and work closely with the custodial staff.

5 Organize collection procedures

Identify who will be responsible for collecting the recyclables and transporting them to the exterior collection container. Work with your school's administration and custodial staff to come up with a collection procedure and develop a plan with all involved.





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6 Educate your school community

Make recycling a visible part of your school community by placing colourful and informative signage around the school. Make sure there are sufficient visual aids, such as posters and bin labels, to inform students and the rest of the school population of what is and is not recyclable. Check out: [How to make effective signage, posters, and stickers](#) for more tips!



Tips for Success

- Label recycling bins with the words “Recycle” or “Recycling Only.”
- Post an accepted materials list on the bin or a nearby wall.
- Share information through announcements, presentations, assemblies, bulletin boards, and whole-school campaigns.

Additional tips for a successful beverage carton recycling system

- **Don't forget about the straw:** The straw from drink boxes needs to either be removed and discarded prior to placing the drink box in the recycling bin, or it can be pushed into the box. Check with your local municipality or recycling service provider for direction on this.
- **Use a mesh bag:** Consider setting up a special recycling bin for drink cartons only and lining the bin with a mesh bag, instead of a plastic bag. Mesh bags get rid of any residual liquid and less liquid in the recycling bin results in better quality recyclable containers for the service provider. Once the recycling bin is full, the contents can be transferred to a larger storage container and the mesh bag can be reused.

32”x 36” mesh bags, which fit into standard garbage bins, can be purchased online or through large retailers.
- **Keep containers loose:** Whether you use reusable mesh bags or plastic recycling bags, containers go loose into outside collection containers. Cartons that have been stored in closed plastic bags start to decompose and cannot be recycled. If you use a plastic bag to line a container, dump the cartons into the outdoor recycling dumpster without the plastic bag and either reuse the bag or dispose of it properly.

