

UWM does recycle

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Contrary to many rumors, UW-Milwaukee’s recycling habits extend far beyond the “paper/cardboard” and “commingle” containers strewn across campus. The university also concerns itself with recycling materials such as metal, chemicals, and old office furniture in a cost-effective manner.

Throughout the Union, the academic buildings, and university housing facilities, recycling has been a priority since the 1980s. As the technology improves, more and more items are recycled on campus to help reduce the amount of waste thrown out.

“We want to make sure what we are throwing away is as environmentally friendly as possible,” said Mike Schmit, Interim Assistant Director of Operations.

The sustainability program, led by Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Kate Nelson, has made great strides since 2008 by improving communication and efforts between the Union, academic buildings and campus housing.

UWM is participating in the international competition “RecycleMania” for the third year to help improve recycling habits on campus. Specifically, UWM is competing in the Per Capita Classic and Waste Minimization categories.

Collectively, UWM produced 897,307 pounds of trash and 718,246 pounds of recycling (paper, commingle, and cardboard) in the first 10 weeks of RecycleMania, as reported by UWM Physical Plant Services. So far in 2011, the ratio of trash to recycling is 5:4.

In the Union

Recycling receptacles can be found easily in the Union, especially on the first floor and street level.

The number of trash and recycling receptacles is determined by the amount of traffic on each floor, said Schmit. Because there are separate containers, the trash is not separated. Instead, black bags are used for trash and clear bags are used for recyclables.

- There are 37 trash bins, nine paper bins, and eight commingle bins on the first floor.
- The ground floor houses 18 trash bins, six paper bins, and nine commingle bins. Additional commingle bins are placed around the Terrace Café as well.

The prevalence of the recycling bins is to help ensure there is “no temptation” to throw recyclables in the trash, said Schmit.

The number of receptacles for recycling is far less on the second and third floors of the Union because of less traffic. But in the case of events, recycling receptacles are put in place to accommodate the event.

Outdoor events are also taken into consideration for recycling. The Union works with Physical Plant Services in order to assure that recycling options are available.

Staff are also encouraged to recycle. However, recycling bins are not in offices, so it requires a little extra effort.

“They do recycle; I’d say about two-thirds of the recyclable goods actually get recycled. Lots of the goods just get dumped in the garbage compactor though,” said Dave Hudson, Union student custodian.

In an average week, the Union recycles:

- 48 cubic yards of cardboard
- 15 yards of commingled (glass, plastic) materials
- 864 gallons of paper

In comparison to the recycling, 960 yards of trash from the trash compactor at the Union were collected during 2010. The compactor is 32 yards long, and it was emptied 30 times last year.

But the Union has been working to improve recycling efforts long before Schmit took his current position.

In 1990, the Union Policy Board banned the use of polystyrene (Styrofoam). This policy came into effect when the United States was working to ban CFCs by 1994.

Recycling computer parts has also been a part of the Union’s efforts to reduce waste. Physical Plant Services works with the Union and housing buildings to make sure old computers are properly recycled.

When the computer monitors were being switched from the large CRT monitors to the slim LCD monitors, the old ones were recycled, said Schmit. Also, the computers that were located in the basement of the Union that were damaged during last summer's floods were also promptly recycled.

In the Dorms

Recycling begins with the resident assistants (RAs) who work at the various campus housing facilities. During the RA training, new student residents are informed about recycling shortly after moving into the dorms.

As the year continues, University Housing Manager Mike Varebrook sends out e-mails reminding RAs to enforce recycling.

"If we do find a lot of recyclables in the trash bags, we will separate them," said Varebrook.

The dorms have paper and commingle recycling bins on every floor of every housing facility. There are separate trash and recycling receptacles within the trash rooms in the dorms as well.

The dorms still produce more trash than recycling, but student efforts to recycle are hoped to increase, said Varebrook.

Recyclable material finds its proper home in the dorms:

- There are over 200 recycling bins located within Sandburg Hall.
- During the course of a month, between 18 and 20 bales of cardboard are recycled from the dorms. Each bale weighs between 600 and 800 pounds.

The cafeterias also have composting services to help reduce waste. The daily compost will resume with the start of spring, around the end of March, said Varebrook.

Additionally, Physical Plant Services help the dorms by collecting bad microwaves, old TVs and other electronics so they are properly recycled.

Across Campus

Kate Nelson took her position managing resources with the Physical Plant Services in January 2008 as the first sustainability coordinator at UWM.

"We had never had a recycling coordinator," she stated.

Nelson is responsible for managing energy, waste, water, and multiple other resources across campus through the Physical Plant Services. Since her arrival, metal and carpet recycling have greatly increased.

Recycling receptacles are available near elevators and in major hallways within the academic buildings on campus. Offices in the academic buildings also have the benefit of their own single-sort recycling containers.

Single-sort recycling dominates the academic buildings to maintain an efficient handling of recyclables. "Single sort" means that all recyclable items are put into a single container and separated after it has been picked up. The recyclable items are kept separate from the trash.

Student concerns about recycling receptacles being available in classrooms are not ignored. Staff limitations and the potential for bugs and pests around the receptacles necessitate that the containers remain in the hallways to efficiently get the recyclables to their outdoor containers. The mobility of the recycling bins throughout the buildings also presents problems for immediate availability of recycling containers. Still, Nelson encourages students to tell her if there aren't recycling accommodations where there ought to be.

Even with limited staff, UWM still recycles 30 percent of its waste and is able to maintain that percentage, said Nelson.

Batteries, hazardous materials, cell phones, eyeglasses, shoes, compost, electronics, metal, DVDs, CDs, pallets, and carpet are a few of the items that have increasingly been recycled since Nelson's arrival.

Nonstandard recycling is picked up by private contractors. The cost for waste hauling is relatively low as well. "Less than \$100,000" takes care of all of the waste hauling for UWM.

Participation in RecycleMania has worked to help educate and improve habits of the 28,182 students and staff members that use campus facilities on a regular basis.

In recycling audits, trash is sorted through to see how much of the trash thrown away could actually be recycled.

"I've seen some ratios as high as 40 or 50 percent," said Nelson.

On a trash audit at the Children's Center, the amount of trash that should have been recycled was at seven percent. Nelson mused, "It seems like the kids have got it figured out."