

Streamlining Waste Bin Infrastructure: Success Stories

U-M's campus-wide waste bin design and placement standards were established in 2016. Since then, the Office of Campus Sustainability has partnered with facility managers and Custodial Services to maintain these standards, including regularly revisiting building spaces with these partners to look for opportunities to refresh and streamline the bin infrastructure. Waste audits have verified the positive impact of adhering to the waste bin standards.

Benefits of Streamlining Waste Infrastructure:

- Increase diversion rate (portion of total waste recycled and composted) and decrease contamination
- Behavioral change - proper sorting, lower contamination rates, culture of commitment to sustainability, increase user's confidence in waste programs
- Healthier environment - avoid old food and potential pests in desk-side bins, encourage movement during the day, improve ergonomics for custodial staff and free up time for more cleaning in other areas
- Reduce plastic liners to landfill (~7% of our waste by weight)

Towsley Children's Center

Action

- Placed 10 full-scale compost bins in the staff areas, and 14 countertop bins in classrooms, primarily for food and paper towel waste
- Provided standardized, paired bins and signage in key locations to boost recycling rates
- Removed stand-alone, non-conforming bins

Impact

- Diversion rate went from 34% to 59%!
(A 70% increase!)
- Total compost diverted in FY23 - nearly 6 tons!



“Our preschool children have learned how to properly sort their trash into the appropriate bin! They help each other and remind the adults when to recycle, compost, or landfill their trash!” -Liz Powers, Evergreen Teacher of children 3 to 5 years old

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North Campus Administrative Complex (NCAC)



Action

- Removed 12 stand-alone, non-conforming, full-size bins
- Removed 300 desk-side bins

Nonconforming bins removed from NCAC

Impact

- Overall waste was down 22% the first quarter of FY25 compared to the first quarter last year
- 70% increase in diversion rate from FY23 to FY24

Administrative Services Building

Action

- Implemented a centrally located bin system which eliminated the need for 98 desk-side bins

Impact

- Avoided 5,000 plastic bags each year!



“At the Administrative Services Building, our commitment to sustainability shines through collaborative efforts and initiatives from the Office of Campus Sustainability like desk-side bin and liner reduction and contamination control. These efforts reduce waste, enhance cleanliness, minimize pest issues, and save valuable staff time, fostering a healthier, more efficient work environment and contributing to a more sustainable future.”

-Air Isa, Custodial Supervisor

**Interested in revamping the bin infrastructure in your space?
Reach out to us at recycle@umich.edu**