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SCI-HEALTH

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University gains the green with recycling efforts

Recycling waste actually turns out to be cheaper for the university than paying to have it put in a landfill.

By **Marc Friedenber** [EMAIL](#)
Collegian Staff Writer

An institution as large as Penn State can have a huge effect on the local environment. It's the job of Al Matyasovsky, Penn State's recycling coordinator, to make sure that it doesn't.

Matyasovsky said Penn State's recycling program was started in 1989 through the Centre County Solid Waste Authority (CCSWA) in Bellefonte for moral, economic and legal reasons. "We have a responsibility to show this can be done," he said.

The amount of waste produced by tens of thousands of students, faculty and staff can be staggering. Last year alone, almost 2 million pounds of waste passed through the program.

Paper represents the largest amount of recyclable material, nearly 75 percent of the "waste stream" -- the total flow of waste.

That much tonnage carries a heavy cost, but one that is lightened by recycling: Putting items in a landfill

costs \$56 per ton, while recycling costs \$5 to \$10 per ton depending on whether the recyclable material are delivered in bags or loose, respectively.

Matyasovsky divides the goods recycled into two categories: "traditional" and "non-traditional." Traditional goods are those most students know are recyclable: papers, plastics, and glass. Non-traditional goods -- including scrap metal, tires, and wooden pallets -- require a specialized recycling system. Penn State recycling handles both types.

Since its formation, the recycling program has expanded the amount of recyclable goods. Matyasovsky makes the decision on what to recycle based on two criteria: first, the types of materials in the waste stream and second, what the county will accept at its recycling plant.

Matyasovsky estimates that nearly two-thirds of newspapers on campus are recycled by students. "I'd like to think that more students than not participate," he said.

The main problem Penn State's recycling program faces isn't student participation -- it's contamination, Matyasovsky said. Contamination, such as paper clips left on a stack of mixed office paper, can result in a steep fine for the university.

Javier Moreno, a member of Earth House, a special living option for students interested in the environment and agriculture, said that Penn State's recycling program could still improve.

"We need a lot of education. Students don't know how to do it. Students at Penn State need to know why it's important," Moreno (sophomore-agricultural and extension education) said.

Earth House members even recycle goods the university's program doesn't cover, including batteries and different types of plastic and glass.

When a student drops off recyclable material in the bins located all over campus, a multi-step process involving hundreds of workers prepares them to be used again.

Goods placed in recycling bins are sorted four times: first by the person dropping it off, then by the janitorial staff, by workers from the Office of Physical Plant and the county. Materials are taken from dorm and campus building barrel locations to the loading dock of each building by Housing and Food Services janitorial staff members, nearly 290 people.

Each morning, trucks pick up the recyclable material at the loading dock. Then, five employees at a processing location near campus help sort and pack them for shipment to the waste authority.

The CCSWA takes out contamination and prepares it for resale to outside companies. Recycled goods originating at the university are sold both nationally and internationally. The waste authority keeps revenue from the sales of goods generated on campus; in return, the university pays nothing for recycling services.

Helena Jones, education coordinator for the CCSWA, said goods coming from Penn State are offloaded, separated and baled by machine, then shipped out to buyers. The CCSWA even produces a product of its own: Half of its incoming newspaper is shredded and sold to farmers as animal bedding.

Act 101, enacted by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection in 1998, mandates recycling in the state's larger municipalities, requires counties to develop municipal waste management plans and provides for grants to offset expenses.

University Policy AD34 requires that all faculty, staff, students and visitors comply with federal, state and local recycling laws. The goals of the policy are to reduce the material put in landfills, comply with state guidelines, encourage the purchase of recycled materials and promote waste reduction.

The policy, enacted in 1990, also prevents people from taking goods from recycling bins and selling it themselves.

Matyasovsky hopes to expand the recycling program in the future to include post-consumer food -- for

example, food left on students' trays at the dining commons. This will be challenging to implement due to a lack of space and equipment. Pulpers, machines that remove water from food, will be needed to reduce the weight of the waste and make it easier to transport.



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