

Bring Recycling Back to School

One very common question/comment Keep Pearland Beautiful receives, “Why don’t we recycle at school or the baseball field or fill in the blank_____?”

Many will agree, finding a recycling solution that is inexpensive yet effective for school or any one time use is not always an easy task. Especially for teachers who take on various other responsibilities when it comes to planning and coordinating extra curricula activities. This is perhaps the reason why Pearland High School, along with over 70% of other high schools and colleges, has never implemented recycling at special school events like the recent volleyball tournament that attract thousands of students, teachers and parents. Who will be in charge of emptying the bins? Who will transport the materials to the recycling center? Who will clean up the mess? Have you ever checked a recycling container that clearly is labeled recycle, yet people will deposit their trash and plastic bottle still half full of liquid? YUCK!!!

It Can be Done: Successful school recycling programs exist nationwide. Through these programs, students and staff members learn about environmental protection and how to contribute reusable items. The method of contribution varies from local drop-off at a recycling center to pickup by municipal or private waste contractors. Keep Pearland Beautiful staff collect bottles, cans and cardboard from several of the schools that have environmental clubs. It all depends on what teacher, volunteers and students are willing to rinse and store the items for a once a week collection. The paper dumpsters are service by the Abitibi Paper Retriever company.

Types of Waste Contributions: In schools, paper is the most common item recycled. This includes white office paper, mixed paper and newspapers. Aluminum cans are also abundant, from lunch packaging and soft drinks. Corrugated cardboard, magazines and plastic bottles are also often contributed. Other recyclable items from schools are glass, cooking oil from the cafeteria and motor oil and filters from the auto shop classroom.

Green Education: In order for a program to be successful, students need to receive information on properly separating recyclables and where to find the proper recycling bins or containers. Through assemblies, programs, announcements, posters, contests and research projects, teachers and staff can boost students' motivation for recycling. Students learn the effects of recycling on animals and plants, natural resources, energy, air and water and the economy. The recycling program could be the subject of classroom discussions, from science to sociology.

Cost Savings for Schools: If planned and implemented correctly, recycling programs can be profitable. According to the Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, 77 percent of schools in North Carolina reported having a recycling program in place. Of the participants, 29 percent reported a net decrease in overall costs, due to the recycling program. By recycling more and throwing away less, the district could potentially save money on their solid waste expenses. Ten percent of the schools in North Carolina collected revenue from the sale of recyclables.

Recycling Statistics for Items Found at Schools: According to resourcefulschools.org, recycling in schools can have tremendous results. For example, one recycled aluminum can is enough energy to run a TV for three hours and saving aluminum cans in general saves about 95 percent of the energy used to make cans. Recycling a mere ton of aluminum cans conserves more than 36 barrels of oil, or 1,655 gallons of gasoline. Furthermore, plastic water bottles are damaging to the environment and the production is equal to a million and a half barrels of oil. Based on this information, it is hard to believe that American citizens threw away 38 billion plastic water bottles in 2006 without recycling them.

Earn Cash: Recycle used Printer and Toner Cartridges from school and library printers. You can trade them in for cash from vendors like Staples, Cartridges for Kids and Office Depot and use that money to further enhance your existing recycling program. As mentioned in last week's article, the Abitibi Paper Retriever dumpsters on every Pearland Campus, creates a small amount of revenue for each school, with some campuses having much better results than others.

With all the strains on school budgets, volunteers are needed more than ever to help implement recycling on every school campus. Send us your ideas and let's see if Keep Pearland Beautiful can help. Comments may be sent to cowles@keeppearlandbeautiful.org or call the office at 281-652-1659.