



Waste Management Behaviors at William & Mary (Education and Awareness Category)

1. Contact Info

Sam Laveson
Sustainability Fellow, William & Mary Dining Services
dining@wm.edu
757-221-1343

2. Focus of Case Study

This case study is focused on signs, posters, and videos we have developed to promote specific individual behaviors that mitigate waste stream issues.

3. Description of Campaign

With our campus reopening during COVID-19 and, as a result, more single-use takeout items being distributed and used, having robust waste-handling infrastructure has been imperative. As such, we have expanded accessibility to compost bins across campus grounds, including locations relatively far from dining halls. This expansion has come not only with more logistical planning, but also with more education and outreach.

Because there are various barriers that keep us from providing 100% compostable service ware, we have helped educate customers on which receptacles (compost, recycling, or trash) items should go into. But even then, there are many nuances that our previous efforts had not addressed. Thus, to help ensure waste stream efficiency, we created several tools related to both contamination and space reduction.

- **Cleaning Containers:** Many students are aware that PP (#5 plastic) containers are recyclable here if and only if they lack food residue. Unfortunately, though, many of those containers have food residue in them after usage, so they often get thrown away. A simple fix to this (as long as the container is not too dirty) is to wipe out the container to remove food residue, and then recycle it.
- **Separating Tops and Bottoms:** Some of the containers we use have compostable bottoms (paper-based) but non-compostable tops (PETE, #1 plastic). Customers frequently mistake these containers to be entirely compostable. Thus, a simple fix is to

separate the tops and bottoms from each other, put the tops into recycling bins, and put the bottoms into compost bins.

- **Stacking Containers:** Last fall, we realized that a lot of space in compost bins was being taken up by empty compostable takeout boxes (ones that have a compostable top and bottom). This empty space has often resulted in bin overflow. To help minimize overflow, a simple fix is to tear takeout boxes in half and stack the halves.

4. Resources and Stakeholders Involved

*Budget: All in all, 20 signs were ordered from William & Mary's print shop for a total of about \$120. This includes printing, adhesive additions, and trimming. That was the main expense for this initiative.

*In-kind resources: This initiative did not involve any in-kind resources.

*Campus departments and groups: Our behavioral campaigns have mainly been supported by William & Mary's Office of Sustainability. We have also relied heavily on Dining Services' Marketing Team and our Print Shop.

*Staff and volunteers: Staff from Dining Services, William & Mary's Office of Sustainability, and William & Mary's print shop have been involved. Student volunteers also have also helped to promote these behaviors through outreach events.

5. Campaign Results

Although we have set up a variety of behavioral initiatives, the one that has gotten by far the most attention is the one about stacking containers. We were able to arrange a photoshoot session with William & Mary President Katherine A. Rowe to show this behavior. We also saw increased engagement from the Office of Residence Life, when they created their own social media outreach to highlight some behavioral initiatives inspired by us.

The main quantitative results we have been able to gather are from social media engagement. When we shared our tips about cleaning plastic containers on Facebook, there were about 19 engagements. When we shared our tips about separating and stacking takeout boxes on Instagram, we got about 413 impressions. We have also seen about one in every eight takeout boxes being folded in half and stacked, which has helped to save some space in the compost bins.

6. Ideas for the Future

As robust as our efforts have been this year, there is still more that could be done. First, we think that although many students know that items labeled as "greenware," "ecoware," and "compostable" are compostable, we think that students often do not take the time to look for

those words. Thus, we would like to do more to promote the behavior of taking the time to look for the words “ecoware,” “greenware,” or “compostable.”

Second, we would like to transfer some of these behaviors to specific on-campus activities and events. Such events could include athletics games and academic ceremonies, for example. There were far fewer of these activities within the past year due to COVID-19, but many of them will likely resume in fall 2021.

Third, we would like to raise more awareness about why it is so important to engage in these waste-sorting behaviors. Having a better understanding of underlying reasons would hopefully help others feel more inclined to engage in these behaviors.

7. Advice

One suggestion I have is to not only examine contents that go into receptacles, but also how people behave when they put items into receptacles. This can be a time-consuming process, but taking note of this has helped me to generate these behavior-related promotions.

My other main suggestion is to not only provide instructions, but also show people performing a specific behavior. For example, with the takeout boxes, I changed the sign from simply having a picture of an opened takeout box, to one with a picture of me physically tearing apart the two halves of a takeout box. More students appeared to perform this behavior when the updated sign was used.

8. Photos and Graphics



Images 1-3: Containers that our behavioral initiatives focus on. Pictures taken by Sam Laveson.



Images 4 and 5: Signs encouraging customers to engage in the aforementioned behavioral initiatives. Pictures on the rightmost sign taken by Alison Walsh, Sustainability Intern for Dining Services, and signs designed by Sam Laveson.



Images 6 and 7: Signs posted on our social media channel as part of our “Sustainable Sunday” series. Screenshots taken by Sam Laveson.



Images 8-10: Students and volunteers educating customers on our behavioral initiatives. Photos taken by Sam Laveson.