



2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Valparaiso University

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Focus of Case study: The Valparaiso University Office of Sustainability took steps to reduce the number of plastic liners being used in trash and recycling containers.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

During spring/summer of 2022 the Office of Sustainability completed a comprehensive audit of campus waste and recycling practices. One of the key findings was that 15% of our campus total waste was plastic bags that we line our trash and recycling containers with. This was the second-highest percentage of any category in the audit (see Figure 1).

Volume of waste categories

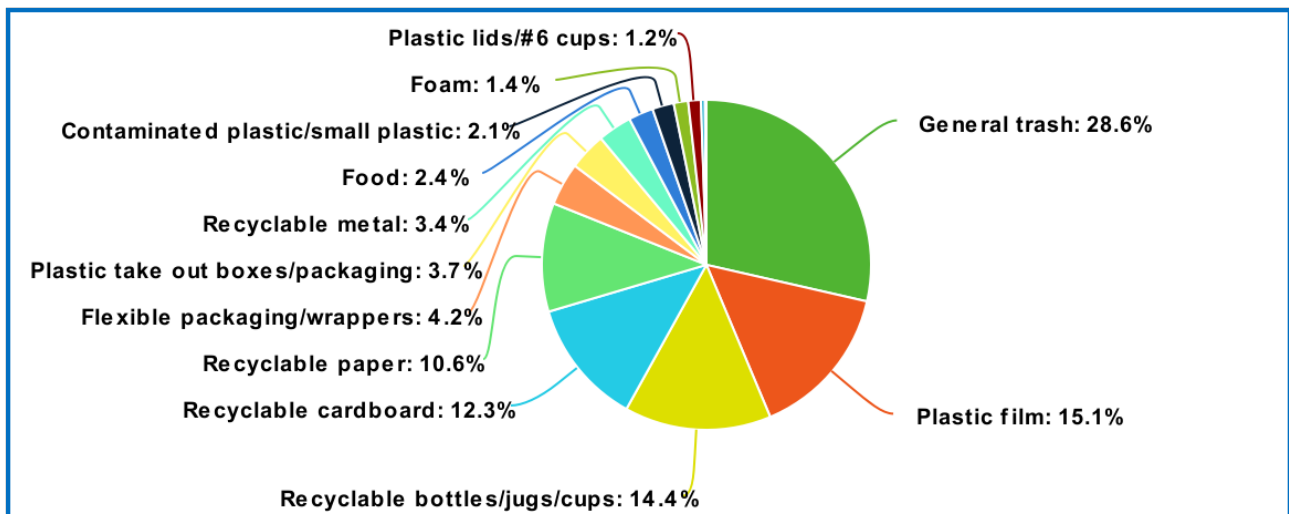


Figure 1: Pie chart showing the volume of each waste category.

During the sorting process of our waste and recycling it was identified that many plastic trash and recycling liners were not being used to their full capacity. There are two main uses for this observation. One was that we had too many trash and recycling containers available for the amount of trash was being produced in a day, and the other was that Building Services emptied the containers too frequently, which lead to a large number of plastic bags used in each building. It was Building Services' protocol to empty containers every day, even if there were just one or two items in the bag.

The first step that we took to combat this issue was to develop a standardized policy for waste and recycling container locations (attached). Some examples include; not allowing waste or recycling containers in classrooms (only available in the hallway) and having only one trash and recycling container in each lab space. After we made this policy, we went through each building on campus and removed/rearranged any containers that were in violation. The second initiative is to only empty waste and recycling containers when they are 50% or more full.

These changes have helped Building Services reduce the time and money spent on pulling bags. It's estimated that we will reduce 35,000 plastic bags a year by these changes.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- Spring 2022- We walked through each building and recording the locations of each trash and recycling container. We also checked how full each container was.
- Spring 2022- Based on what we observed, we wrote a comprehensive trash and recycling policy and was sent out to campus.
- Summer 2022- We walked through each building and removed any containers that we agreed weren't necessary, and/or in violation of our trash and recycling container policy. We also replaced some outdated containers and added recycling in some locations that didn't have a lot of recycling containers. Extra containers were brought to our storage area

Resources and stakeholders involved:

The Facilities Management Waste Reduction Team and Building Services were the main stakeholders involved.

Describe the Results of this campaign component:

General results:

- These changes have helped Building Services reduce the time and money spent on pulling bags.
- We have made a positive environmental impact by reducing our use of plastic bags

Specific measurable impact:

- By removing 210 unnecessary waste and recycling containers, we saved approximately **51,240 plastic bags** per year, with an associated cost saving of **\$10,760**.
- By only emptying the remaining containers when they are half full, we estimate that we are saving **13,145 plastic bags** per year with a cost savings of **\$2,629**.

What would you do differently in the future?

N/A

What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

Make sure you work closely with your building services/cleaning team. They'll be one of the best resources when it comes to answering questions about specific trash and recycling containers, since they're in the buildings every day.

Photos and Graphics:



Many small bags were contained in this larger bag



Recycling bags with only a few items inside

Appendix A- Campus Waste and Recycling Policies:

Building Services Policies

- All waste and recycling receptacles should be placed next to each other
- Building Services empties waste and recycling receptacles in common areas
- Classrooms and meeting rooms should not have waste or recycling receptacles
- Lab spaces may have 1 waste and 1 recycling container maximum if there is lab waste generated
- Each office will be provided with one small trash and one small recycling container
- All waste receptacles that are emptied by Building Services should be lined with a black plastic bag, and all recycling receptacles should be lined with a clear plastic bag
- Waste and recycling receptacles should be emptied when they are more than 50% full

Personal Responsibilities

- Office waste and recycling containers will not be emptied by building services. It is the responsibility of the personnel in the office to empty these into the receptacles in the hallway or breakroom.
- Office waste and recycling containers should not be lined with any plastic bags. Food waste should be brought to the receptacle in the hallway or breakroom and not deposited in the desk-side container.
- When possible, recyclables should be emptied loose into recycling containers or dumpsters. Clear plastic bags or paper bags may be used if necessary.

Hazardous Items

- Information Technology should be contacted to help recycle unwanted electronic items such as printers, PCs, monitors, cables, etc.
- Used batteries should be placed in the 5-gallon buckets located in each building
- Ink and toner cartridges can be sent or picked up by our Mail Center to be recycled
- For any other hazardous materials, please visit portercountyrecycling.org.