LIBRARY SITE AUDIT FOR RECYCLING

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anybody interested in assessing, starting or improving their recycling program at their library.

LIBRARY SITE AUDIT FOR RECYCLING

ALIGN SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN YOUR MISSION.

RECYCLING IN THE MAIN LOBBY On many campuses the main lobby or main reading room of their library is one of the most prominent locations on campus. This area is key to promoting campus to the public, to prospective students, and even to alumnae. What message are you sending through the décor, furnishings, and maintenance of this space? Bins in this location may be of more value from a "Green Campus" messaging perspective than from the perspective of how much material you will recover (read more on this concept at our "Green But Unseen" blog post).

From a pure recycling perspective, for anything less than high-aesthetic bins, it will be a massive fight to get them placed in this location in the first place. Even if you succeed, they will likely end up hidden in an unseen corner and as a result will go under used.

If you are able to place bins in this area, remember that it gets a lot of traffic from people not familiar with your program so you are going to need to make it very easy (both to do and to understand) if you want folks to recycle. This is an area where parallel access and restrictive openings are critical (read about this concept at our "Better Aesthetics = Better Results" blog post).

OTHER PUBLIC AREAS OF THE LIBRARY Other than staff offices, most areas of libraries are public spaces. As such, parallel access and bins with restrictive openings become critically important to the success of the recycling effort. Given the number of potential guests unfamiliar with your recycling program, having well labeled bins with specific info about what can and cannot be recycled is very important.

LIBRARY STUDY CARRELS One of the trickiest sections to deal with in campus libraries is library study carrels. In most libraries, when they were set up, the area with the study carrels was dotted with small wastebasket sized trash cans, usually 1 for every 2-4 carrels. The wastebaskets are so frequent because there is a perception that if you don't have them that often, students will leave their waste in the carrel creating a cleaning hassle. From a total volume of material perspective, there is not a lot of total material in those bins, so you are not going to want to dedicate a lot of resources to collecting. However, from a waste composition and public perception perspective, you are going to need to do something in the way of collections. Because this is a high profile public area, if you don't do anything for recycling, that will be noticed and can undermine your recycling efforts in other areas of campus.

Much, if not most, of what is in those bins is paper and bottles & cans (even if food and drink are not allowed in the library).

One option is to replace all of the small trash cans and place a highly visible trash and recycling cluster in each area. If you place it between the carrels and the exit, it will be convenient enough for students to drop stuff into the applicable bin on their way out of the library. This minimizes the "students just leaving their trash in the cubicle" issue.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS A big question is whether or not food and beverages are allowed in the library.

- If beverages are allowed, you are going to want to distribute bottle & can bins throughout the library.
- However, keep in mind that even if not sanctioned, you are going to have a significant number of bottles & cans smuggled into the library, enough so that you are going to want to have bins for them. You may have to compromise and place a central bin on each floor. Maybe somewhere near the elevator or stairs – under the theory that someone who managed to get their bottle or can to the upper floor needs a place to recycle it.

Another consideration are public copy machines and printers. Typically there are a significant number of "public" copy machines and printers scattered throughout the library. Ensure that there is a paper recycling bin near each, with parallel trash access (to ensure that trash doesn't end up in the paper and vice versa). Adding restrictive paper slot openings on the paper recycling bin and using parallel access to ensure that they are located in tandem with a trash bin can also help minimize contamination.

TAKEAWAYS

AS A HIGHLY VISIBLE PUBLIC SPACE ON CAMPUS:

- Libraries may benefit from high-aesthetic bins
- A lack of recycling in a library may undermine your program elsewhere on campus
- Some users may not be familiar with your recycling program making good labeling key
- Low-aesthetic bins may be considered an eye-sore and relegated to locations where they are harder to find

FROM AN OPERATIONAL STANDPOINT:

- Servicing small waste bins throughout the study carrels can be labor intensive
- Opting for clusters of larger waste/recycling bins can centralize this collection effort
- Despite food and drink possibly being banned, offer bottle & can recycling in central areas

AS MEASURES TO MINIMIZE CONTAMINATION:

- Near copy machines, offering parallel access (waste bins and paper recycling) can help minimize contamination
- Consider restrictive openings and clear labeling on bins

"Much of what is in these bins is paper, bottles, and cans—even if food & drinks aren't allowed in the library."

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

PARALLEL ACCESS Having the same system for both trash and recycling. Involves co-locating the trash and recycling in visibly different well-labeled bins.

- If you have a trash can without an adjoining recycling bin, too often recyclables will be thrown into the trash.
- If you have a recycling bin without an adjoining trash can, too often trash will be thrown into the recycling, contaminating the recycling and resulting in an entire bin full of recyclables being discarded as trash.

RESTRICTIVE OPENINGS Having different shaped openings that easily communicate which material goes into which container.

- Typically involves long thin slot for paper and round hole for bottles & cans.
- Size of bottle and can hole can be a big issue. Too small and it can't accommodate a standard 2-liter bottle. Too big and it's not obvious that it's a restrictive opening.
- Restrictive slots can also be cut into cardboard dumpsters (a much thicker and wider version of the paper slot). Encourages or forces people to flatten their cardboard box to get it into the dumpster.

SEMI-AUTOMATED CARTS Made by several different companies (e.g. Toter).

- Typically come in some variation of 90-gallon, 60-gallon, and 30-gallon sizes.
- Designed to be dumped hydraulically by special cart dumper attached to a truck or compactor. There are also some stand-alone cart dumpers that can be used to dump into other containers.
- Typically have two large rear wheels that can be tilted back onto like a handtruck. Most come with only the two rear wheels, but some (e.g. Toter) are available with front casters so they can be wheeled without tipping.

DUAL STREAM Collecting recyclables in two categories, typically one for mixed paper (including cardboard) and one for commingled bottles & cans.

DUAL STREAM PLUS A modified version of dual stream in which cardboard is kept separate from either paper or bottles & cans.

SINGLE STREAM Collecting all recyclables (paper, cardboard and bottles & cans) together in one bin and sending to special facility to sort it all out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GARETT LAUGAVITZ Working in marketing at Max·R, Garett coordinates trade shows, contributes to the company blog and serves on their Green Team. Garett has been with Max·R since 2005; he began working in manufacturing, joined the marketing team in 2008 and was named Assistant Marketing Manager in 2011. Garett has undertaken or contributed to a number of green projects including switching to 100% renewable energy, achieving Audubon International's property designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, as well as various education and recycling initiatives.