On a Mission to Minimize Waste

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), each person in America generates, on average, 4.6 pounds of municipal solid waste each day, of which 1.5 pounds is recycled (33%), and the remaining 3.1 pounds is landfilled or incinerated. That’s the equivalent of 1 pound of garbage per person for every 8-hour workday, which quickly adds up.

Unfortunately, much of the ‘garbage’ languishing in landfills is actually recyclable or reusable. The EPA reports that the national recycling rates for aluminum cans, plastic soft drink bottles and paper/paperboard are just 48.6%, 36.6% and 54.5%, respectively. The OSWM&R staff is conducting a pilot program to find out just how much garbage we actually generate at work when everything that is recyclable or reusable is kept out of the trashcan. Starting on June 22, we brought in cloth towels from home to dry our hands on, made the switch to reusable water bottles and coffee mugs, and ate lunches with plastic utensils. Staff members of the OSWM&R assembled a worm bin for composting food waste.

Cindy Jackson, Manager of the OSWM&R, shows the results of an active waste minimization campaign in her office. Only 3 pounds of trash were generated by nine people in five days.

Recycling Tips

Does your department have unneeded office supplies? Donate them to the Office Supply Exchange (OSE). The OSE is now operational year-round. Contact Tara Bryant at tara.bryant@gatech.edu for more information, or to make a donation.
silverware that we washed and reused. We even built a worm bin and started composting our food scraps, since food is another common item found in landfills. From Monday to Friday we held on to our garbage, then weighed it and sorted it by hand at the end of the week.

During the first week of the waste audit (June 22—26), our nine person office generated just 3 pounds of garbage (0.6 pounds per day). Our week’s worth of garbage could have fit in an ordinary grocery bag. The second week (June 29—July 2) we were even more diligent, generating 1.5 pounds of garbage during the 4-day week (0.4 pounds per day). Without disposable cups, paper plates, plastic silverware, aluminum cans, food waste and similar items, our garbage consisted mostly of napkins, candy wrappers, and vending machine snack bags.

If everyone on campus did his or her part to minimize waste, we would save on the cost of landfilling trash and could divert those resources to more productive purposes. In addition to being financially and environmentally responsible, waste minimization is consistent with Georgia Tech’s mission to contribute to a prosperous and sustainable future for the State of Georgia.

Recycling Success Stories: GT Dining

Last month’s Recycle Buzz included a brief report on a composting program which launched at Brittain Dining Hall this summer. This month we’re following up with an in-depth look at the waste minimization programs within Georgia Tech’s Dining Services. From organic ingredients, to packaging and even ketchup dispensers, Dining Services is going green. GT Dining representatives Dori Martin, Staci Heck and Kelly Raw explain that sustainability is one of the department’s top 3 goals, along with customer service and food safety. Efforts to increase sustainability are evident throughout the 22 operational units, which include the Student Center food court, Brittain and Woodruff Dining Halls, and a variety of retail outlets across campus.

Cutting Out Disposable Cups

One of the biggest initiatives this summer is the removal of all polystyrene (often referred to as Styrofoam) from the dining halls. In the past, the dining halls on campus provided polystyrene cups for students who wished to take drinks to go. Dori Martin, Marketing Manager at Sodexo, reveals that when students return to campus this fall, their meal plans will include a reusable plastic mug for to-go drinks, thereby eliminating the need for disposable cups. In addition to being a cost effective way of allowing students to take drinks out of the dining halls, the new program has environmental and perhaps even health benefits. Dori says studies have shown that toxic chemicals can leach from polystyrene cups into the liquids they contain.

Despite the many benefits of switching to reusable mugs, Kelly Raw, Assistant Marketing Manager at Sodexo, anticipates that gaining student support will be a challenge. The program will place additional responsibility on students, as they will be have to wash their mugs and remember to carry the mugs with them. Dining Services has prepared an aggressive education campaign to inform students about the benefits of reusable mugs. Kelly is confident that once students are aware of the benefits they will be more willing to participate.

Communication is Key

GT Students have already shown that sustainability is an issue that they are concerned with. When school is in session students meet monthly with Dining Services representatives to identify priorities and develop solutions. Although Dining Services can’t meet every request, the meetings have
If you have a recycling success story that you would like to share with the campus community, let us know and we will be happy to feature it in a future issue of the Recycling Buzz.

Ask Enviro-Man!

Question: Where can I find information about home composting?

Answer: The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) booklet “Composting at Home in Georgia” is a great resource. This concise guide provides an overview on the types of compost methods, what can and cannot be composted, and how to maintain a compost bin. The booklet can be downloaded from the DCA website.

Enviro-Man

To ask Enviro-Man a question, click here.
Stats for June 2009

18.1 tons of mixed paper were recycled in the month of June. Let’s make this a great year for recycling by placing mixed paper in the recycling containers provided by the Office of Solid Waste Management and Recycling.

Upcoming Events

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep Atlanta Beautiful Electronics Recycling Day</td>
<td>Grady High School, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>August 15, 2009  (8am—4pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia Recycling Coalition 18th Annual Conference &amp; Trade Show</td>
<td>St. Simons Island, GA</td>
<td>August 23—26, 2009</td>
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<td>Moore in America</td>
<td>Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>May 2—October 3, 2009</td>
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Comments and Suggestions

If you have any questions or suggestions about our program, please feel free to contact us by simply replying to this newsletter. We are here to help, and together, we can work to benefit the environment.

Office of Solid Waste Management & Recycling
Cindy Jackson, Program Manager
151 Sixth Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30332-0350
Tel: 404-385-0088 ~ Fax: 404-385-0710

Visit our Website

As part of our effort to provide you with better services we continually update our website. Recycling Contact Person listings, recycling guidelines, and useful links can now be found at www.recycle.gatech.edu.