KEEP COMPOST CLEAN: CUT THE CONTAMINATION

As a member of a Green Star School, you have helped lead the way by participating in the first comprehensive school waste reduction program in the nation, through composting, recycling, and reuse! Compost reduces organic materials landfilled and creates valuable soil amendments for local farmers and gardeners. Composting is one of the easiest and most effective first steps you can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, specifically methane, which is generated when our food and organic waste is landfilled. However, what we put in the compost bin needs to actually be compostable in order to create clean and usable compost.

This fall, Eco-Cycle’s Schools team had the opportunity to tour A1 Organics, the commercial composting facility in Keenesburg, that accepts organic waste from the entire Front Range, including Green Star Schools. During this visit, Clinton Sander, A1’s marketing manager, led Eco-Cycle staff through the facility, displaying their process and equipment used to turn organic food waste and compostables into nutrient rich compost. However, the issue of compost contamination was evident.

In early August, A1 Organics implemented a new compost contamination policy. They began inspecting every incoming truckload of compost, rejecting those with unmanageable levels of contamination. These rejected truckloads must then be landfilled at the expense of waste haulers and their customers.

Some contamination was small and more inconspicuous, such as rubber band tags on broccoli or plastic produce stickers on fruit, but many others were more obvious and bewildering, such as large plastic bags, glass bottles, plastic and metal utensils, or entire takeout containers with food and trash inside. Glass especially is a big concern, because it breaks into shards, which are too small to be screened out through the half inch screens. They are sharp and dangerous hazards in finished compost. Produce stickers and some pieces of plastic are also too small to be screened out. They become microplastics, contaminating our environment, impacting soil, water, and ultimately, our food. So remember: no metal, no glass, and no plastic in the compost!

The risk of compost contamination increases when eating areas are spread out and service ware includes a mixture of trash and compostable materials. This is common at high schools, where off-campus food service materials often make their way to school waste bins. When this happens, it is even more important to encourage thoughtful participation of waste sorting, in addition to education. Last school year, Boulder High School (BHS) Environmental Science students volunteered as waste goalies. They noticed that when volunteers were standing by the waste stations, students and staff for the most part were sorting trash, recycle, and compost correctly without help. However, when waste goalies would walk away and observe from a distance, people would no longer take the time to sort correctly. BHS students noted, “Having compost bins is not enough. People knowing how to sort is not enough. What we need is everyone to be committed to sorting their [waste] properly, and this is the conundrum: how do we do that?...We need to do more as a community to help stop the contamination of compost.”

We appreciate the active participation and support of the Green Star Schools community to keep the compost clean!

Ways to Promote Proper Waste Sorting at School:

1) Encourage students and staff to take the extra few seconds to pause and sort waste correctly.
2) If you are unsure, remember the simple phrase: WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!
3) Ensure waste sorting stations are labeled with clear and visible signage.
4) Streamline compost bins to locations that will collect the largest volume of clean compost. SVVSD is currently supporting compost collections of school kitchens and cafeterias.
5) Recruit Green Teams and student groups to act as waste goalies (excellent way to fulfill volunteer hours) and engage with peers to waste sort correctly through announcements, competitions, sign-making, student messaging, and more!

Eco-Cycle is available to support schools with education and waste sorting and provide additional materials as needed.

We have confidence that our community will continue to work together to meet A1’s and Earth’s standards. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to composting, waste reduction, and a sustainable future!

To learn more about what is compostable, visit Eco-Cycle’s Compost Guidelines.

A special, HUGE thank you to the amazing Green Star School custodial and kitchen staff for your support and hard work. You are the backbone of making this program successful!

We have confidence that our community will continue to work together to meet A1’s and Earth’s standards.
GETTING CREATIVE WITH REUSE

Reuse is the best way to reduce waste! These Green Star School teachers are taking reuse to another level with creative science, STEAM, and school garden projects:

At Monarch PK-8, middle school teacher, Kristin McLaurin, has a closet full of odds and ends that she saves such as tape rolls, plastic containers, and cloth and art scraps for science and eco-art projects. It takes time and space to save these items, but with these materials, students can be innovative in creating projects, while also practicing reduce and reuse, and save costs on new materials.

Contributed by Kristin McLaurin, Teacher, Monarch PK-8, BVSD

Horizons K-8: STEAM teacher, Carol Schwendener, chooses projects that reuse materials, like Spheros, Legos, Knex, or Micro Bits. She prioritizes upcycled materials like toilet paper rolls and old paper, and purchases other materials from Art Parts.

Contributed by Carol Schwendener, Teacher, Horizons K-8, BVSD

New Vista High School is building a community garden from reused and recycled materials.

Contributed by Dustin Bailey, Teacher, New Vista, BVSD

ZERO WASTE EVENTS

This fall, several schools partnered with Eco-Cycle to host Zero Waste community events, reducing waste through reuse, recycling, and composting!

Whittier Elementary celebrated its 140th Anniversary and Heritage Night with an evening of delicious potluck-style food and a parade, celebrating students’ unique heritages and cultures. Families were encouraged to bring their own reusable dishes and utensils. In addition, Whittier partnered with Nude Foods to provide reusable bags for participants to use at the event, significantly reducing single-use disposable materials.

Other Green Star Schools: Columbine (Boulder), Bear Creek, Eisenhower, and High Peaks Elementary Schools and Angevine Middle School also partnered with Eco-Cycle for Zero Waste Events, including back to school picnics, dinners, afterschool Moo-Mobile treats from Sweet Cow, carnivals, and fall festivals!

Hosting a school community event? Want to make it Zero Waste? Contact kathy@ecocycle.org for support!

Eagle Crest Eco Eagles worked on start-up tasks to support their school’s sustainable initiatives. This fall, Eco Eagles:
- Replenished Earth-friendly cleaners for staff.
- Inventoried and ordered replacements for classroom Green Kits, which include reusable service ware for parties. (thanks to Eco-Cycle’s Zero Waste mini-grant!)
- Cleaned out the school gardens to prepare for winter.

Contributed by Stephanie Potter, Teacher, Eagle Crest, SVVSD

RECYCLE AND COMPOST! Remember to RECYCLE and COMPOST! It’s easy, and makes a big impact! Use our handy guide to know what goes where.

Thank you to the teachers, staff, students, and partners at all of our Green Star Schools for your sustainability efforts. I look forward to continued collaborations with you this school year! Kathy