



eco-cycle

# GREEN STAR SCHOOLS® NEWS

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## 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.



Sander identifying compost contamination



Plastic containers & produce stickers in 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!** ★



Ryan Elementary (BVSD)



Blue Mountain (SVVSD)

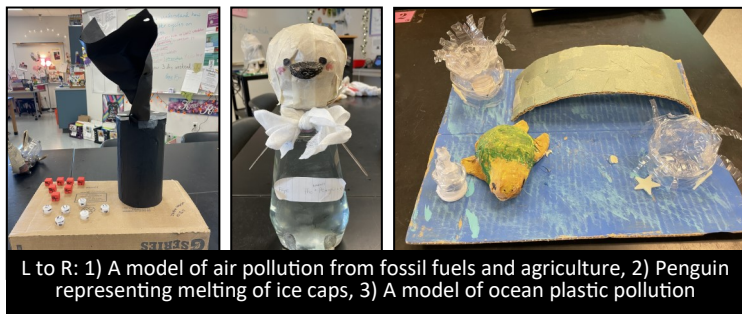


Finished compost at A1



## 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:



L to R: 1) A model of air pollution from fossil fuels and agriculture, 2) Penguin representing melting of ice caps, 3) A model of ocean plastic pollution

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*



Students create pinball game from reused items

**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 140<sup>th</sup> 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 reusables 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](mailto:kathy@ecocycle.org) for support!*

## STUDENTS TAKE ACTION FOR OUR EARTH

Last spring, **Platt Middle School** show choir students created and performed a show about climate change. The students selected the songs and planned the choreography. They debated the opinions of the antagonist and protagonist while writing the script, researched the facts, held auditions, and created the props, even inspiring their teacher to do a better job for Mother Earth.

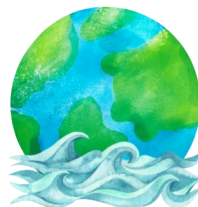
During the captivating show, through dialogue, song, and dance, a group of young climate activists convinces climate naysayers, to care about the environment. At the end of the show, the group showcased their tree of commitments, each leaf representing actions students promised to take such as reducing shower times, biking instead of driving, and other ways to better our environment.



Platt Middle School show choir students

*Contributed by Karen Hannahoe, Teacher, Platt MS, BVSD*

**Eisenhower Elementary:** For Youth Climate Action Day, EcoEagle Ambassadors, using the three pillars of youth action (Imagine, Create, Share), created a schoolwide poster contest to engage other students to think about their own climate action. The theme was: "Ways YOU Can Help Clean the Ocean." EcoEagles advertised the contest with announcements, flyers, and emails. They received numerous poster submissions and had many conversations with other students about the importance of taking care of the ocean, climate action in general, and what concrete actions they can take right now. The contest encouraged kids and families to think about their own personal environmental actions.



*"No one is too small to make a difference." - Greta Thunberg*

*Contributed by Marti Hirsch, School Staff, Eisenhower, BVSD*

**Centaurus High School:** Eco Warriors organized their first trash pickup day of the school year to clean up litter around the school's campus.

*Contributed by Kristen McDermott, Teacher, Centaurus, BVSD*



Centaurus student volunteers

**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*

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*