



WORKPLACE RECYCLING NEW RESEARCH: BIN SET-UP CAN BOOST RECYCLING

A new study shows how office recycling and trash bin set-ups can increase recycling by 20% while reducing contamination in the bins. Here are the key research findings, along with tips to improve workplace recycling.

Key Findings

Increasing convenience improved recycling behavior. Office workers need both recycling and trash bins at their desks. This makes recycling a quick and easy choice, while ensuring that daily trash items (paper towels, food scraps, tissues, etc.) do not end up in the recycling bin.



Desk-side recycling bins paired with smaller trash bins increased recycling and reduced contamination. Replacing a desk-sized trash bin with a little one attached to the recycling bin at each desk proved most effective.

Here are the results:

- Increased recyclables from 65% to 85%, and decreased contamination in the recycling bin by 20% (see chart).
- Reduced the amount of recyclables in the trash from 29% to 13% (see chart).
- Reduced the amount of office paper in the trash to almost zero.

Employees with little desk-side trash bins also had increased recycling awareness and knowledge. Researchers suggest that this bin set-up motivates participation because it is convenient and restricts some recyclables from easily fitting in the trash bin. Importantly, this set-up demonstrated that it does motivate more recycling and significantly reduced nonrecyclable waste in the recycling bin.

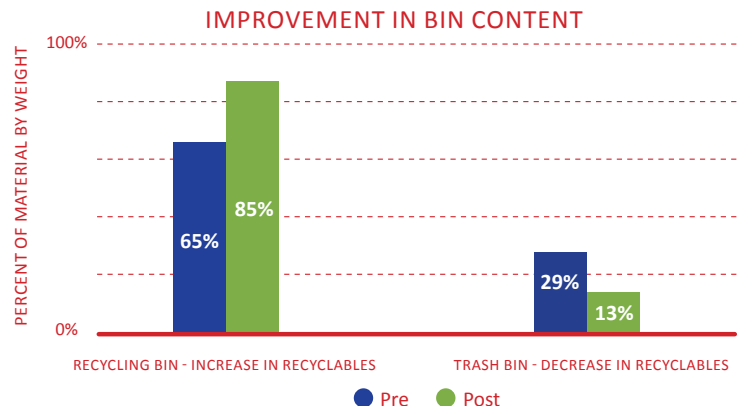
About the Research

Action Research conducted the 2014 study commissioned by Keep America Beautiful and sponsored by PepsiCo Recycling.

A total of 34 offices in Atlanta, Boston, Houston and San Diego were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) Two equal-sized recycling and trash bins at desk, (2) Recycling bin only at desk, (3) Little trash bin hanging on recycling bin at desk, and (4) Information only; existing recycling and trash bins were not replaced. The information flier was given in all conditions.

Researchers gathered data on:

- Employee knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relating to workplace recycling.
- Weight and percentages of recyclables in the recycling and trash bins through waste audits.
- Frequency of materials in proper and improper bins.



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Two equal-sized recycling and trash bins also increased recycling—but did not keep recyclables out of the trash. Desk-side recycling and trash bins had less success than the little trash bin scenario, with the following results:

- Increased recyclables from 68% to 85%, and decreased contamination in the recycling bin by 17%.
- No significant decrease of recyclables in the trash, which continued to contain approximately 25% recyclables.
- No significant change in the weight of recyclable paper in the trash.

While employees with equal-sized bins did report improved recycling awareness and knowledge, it was less than those with little desk-side trash bins. Two equal-sized bins are recommended if investment in new infrastructure is not feasible.

Education alone was not enough. In the study, all scenarios received the same informational fliers, but offices receiving only information showed no change in recycling behavior. That being said, it’s vital to provide recycling education, such as fliers, signage, etc., to keep employees up-to-date on any changes and inform new employees. Identify frequently misplaced items and periodically remind employees of proper bin placement for these items.



Tips to Improve Workplace Recycling

Make workplace recycling easy.

- At desk-side: Use the little trash bin along with a recycling bin. If not feasible, use equal-sized trash and recycling bins.
- In common areas: Include paired recycling and trash bins.
- Keep signage simple (see example).
- Match messaging to bin: List most common recyclables on the recycling bin and trash items on the trash bin.

Maintain a consistent program throughout the building.

- Establish a consistent recycling and trash bin set-up, as well as collection program, in all offices and common areas to decrease confusion for employees and janitorial staff. This will improve participation and the quality of recyclables.
- Keep messaging consistent on bins, emails, fliers, and any other materials. Ensure that all janitorial staff receives the same information on recycling program guidelines.

Take advantage of outside resources.

Visit www.RecyclingatWork.org for a copy of this research report along with tools, templates and other guidance to establish an effective workplace recycling program.

