

Taking Out the Trash

UNH Sustainability Institute studies waste habits

Friday, April 29, 2016



STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT CAMERON COOK '17 AND THE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE'S JENNIFER ANDREWS SEPARATE TRASH, RECYCLABLES AND COMPOSTABLE ITEMS AT THE EARTH DAY DUMPSTER DIVE.

Piles of waste lay in the Mills Road visitor parking lot as students, staff and community members sorted through bag after bag of discarded items, searching with gloves and trash pickers for answers.

The event, called "Earth Day Dumpster Dive," was organized by the UNH Sustainability Institute and the Zero Waste Task Force

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and sought to examine the waste habits of the campus community in hopes of raising awareness about recycling and sustainable living in celebration of Earth Day, April 22.

“We want to see what’s going on, and then, hopefully, that information will spur people to think more about what they’re wasting, what they’re throwing out, being more conscious of recycling or using less. We want people to think about how we can make UNH a zero-waste community,” said Colleen Flaherty, the communications coordinator for the Sustainability Institute.

Teams rummaged through a recycling dumpster, a residence hall landfill dumpster and a trash container from an academic building, sorting the waste into three bins — recyclables, compost and landfill. The bins were weighed and recorded and their contents properly disposed.

The objective was to find out what amount of recyclable material is being thrown into trash containers and what amount of landfill material is being thrown into the recycling containers, as well as how much compostable material is being discarded appropriately.

The results showed room for improvement.

Of the 86.43 pounds sampled from the recycling dumpster, 6 pounds of it should have been thrown into the landfill dumpster.

From the residential landfill container, 51.5 pounds were sampled; 26 were actual trash while 18.5 pounds could have been recycled and 7 pounds could have been composted.



**THE EVENT WAS ORGANIZED BY
THE SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE
AND ZERO WASTE TASK FORCE**

Of 66.43 pounds sampled from the academic building's landfill dumpster, 14.1 pounds were garbage while 47.63 pounds should have been recycled. The remaining 4.7 pounds belonged in a compost bin.

"It is clear that there is certainly room for improvement. That is part of what the Zero Waste Task Force will be focused on moving forward," said Jennifer Andrews, project director of the Sustainability Institute.

There are ways the UNH community could better dispose of waste.

"If you have a bottle, recycle it; don't throw it in the trash.

Sometimes that might mean just taking those extra few steps to look for a recycling bin. If you can, use a reusable water bottle or a reusable coffee container," Flaherty said, adding that using less to begin with helps.

Flaherty also noted several UNH Dining locations offer discounts to customers who bring a reusable coffee mug, and the dining halls allow students to fill a reusable container for take-out food or beverages. Both UNH Dining and the Sustainability Institute encourage students to take smaller portions during meals and to go back for seconds as needed in order to reduce waste.



TEAMS SORTED ABOUT 205 POUNDS OF DISCARDED ITEMS.

UNH also uses a single-stream recycling system, which means all recyclables can go into the same container. "If you see a recycling bin, even if it says 'recycling' and just looks like a bottle bin, paper, plastic and anything that's a part of

the single stream system can go into that," Flaherty said. The single-stream system accepts paper, plastic, glass, metal and

cardboard.

“Just be mindful of what you’re using in your daily life and the easy ways to reduce that. Or, at the very least, try to put waste in the proper stream,” Flaherty said.

According to Flaherty, all of UNH's dining halls compost their food waste and composting containers are available in the Gables and Woodsides apartments. While there is no plan to bring more compost bins to campus right now, the Zero Waste Task Force is looking into it as a possibility for the future.

The Sustainability Institute has [guides available](#) on how — and what — to recycle.

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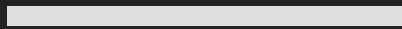
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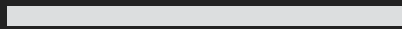
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