

Report on Western's Recycling Program

To: Western's Student Government
From: Nicole Meyer
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Subject: Report on Western's Recycling Program

Introduction

A successful recycling program is both environmentally and economically beneficial. Recycling reduces air and water pollution, saves energy, and helps with environmental sustainability. Besides protecting resources, recycling can be a cost effective way to avoid rising landfill cost. Since the demand for landfills is increasing and space is limited, landfill owners have the ability to increase their prices. "In 1986, there were 7,683 municipal solid waste landfills. A survey done in 1995 showed only 3,581" (Kolnitz 4). This cost will continue to rise due to the decreasing amounts of space for landfills.

It is mandatory in the City of La Crosse to recycle clear, green, and brown glass, steel, tin, aluminum cans, and newspapers. But according to the City of La Crosse's website, paper and plastics can also be recycled. These recycled materials can be turned into new products. However, plastic and paper that is thrown in the trash is burned by Xcel Energy to create electricity for the city ("City of La Crosse, WI-Official Website"). The La Crosse area uses a waste-to-energy facility that supplies waste for the production of refuse-derived fuel. Western's waste is currently taken to incinerators where this fuel is generated. This practice is helpful by reducing the amount of trash that ends up in the landfill. Unfortunately, incinerators are the largest new source of air pollution and they produce millions of tons of toxic ash, which ends up in landfills (Kolnitz 4). With an increase in recycling, the amount of trash Western produces will decrease. Along with a decrease in cost due to incinerator fees, Western could contribute to a reduction in this toxic ash.

The goal of this research was to determine if there is a demand for improvements to Western's existing recycling program. Western Technical College began its recycling program last spring with paper and co-mingle (aluminum, plastic, and glass) containers. Currently, recycling containers are placed sparingly throughout the school and there are no containers in classrooms or outside on campus. Through interviews and surveys, I am hoping to gain the opinions of students, staff, and faculty on whether they feel Western should make improvements to the current recycling program.

Methods

Fifty students, faculty, and staff were selected to complete a survey about their perceptions of Western's recycling program. These surveys were handed out throughout the La Crosse campus. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix 1. Not all of the surveys were filled out completely, so in those instances I have referenced the actual number that answered in the graphs below:

Survey Results

For these six questions, a combination of fifty students, faculty, and staff were surveyed. All questions were answered with a yes or no response. However, for the last question, two percent of the population did not give an answer.

	Yes	No
1. Do you recycle at home?	90%	10%
	74%	26%
2. Do you recycle at school?		
3. Do you know where recycling containers are located in school?	86%	14%
	50%	50%
4. Do you think the locations of the existing recycling containers are convenient?	96%	4%
5. If recycling bins were located in classrooms, offices, and outside on campus, would you be more inclined to recycle?	90%	8%
6. Would you like to see improvements made to Western's recycling program?		
*Two percent did not give an answer for this question.		

For the respondents who answered yes they do recycle, they were also asked to choose what items they recycle at school and home. The possible choices were aluminum, paper, plastic, and glass. Their responses are in the table below:

	Aluminum	Paper	Plastic	Glass
7. What do you recycle at home?	91%	44%	48%	86%

8. What do you recycle at school?	59%	86%	37%	18%
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The results of this survey question indicate there is a decrease in the number of items people recycle at school compared to at home, with the exception of paper. This difference, however, could be due to where that person lives and what items are accepted for recycling. Another factor may be that people don't use or bring the same items they recycle at home to school. For example, 86% of those surveyed, recycle glass at home compared to only 18% who recycle glass at school. The large difference in recycling glass may be due to the fact that many people don't bring glass containers to school.

The next question on the survey was "What is your perception of Western's concern for the environment?"

Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Concerned
14%	70%	10%

The result of this question showed that a majority of respondents believe Western is somewhat concerned for the environment. For those that felt Western was either very concerned or not concerned, there was only a 4% difference.

In response to the next question "How would you rate the effectiveness of Western's recycling program" respondents were asked to rate their opinion on a scale of 1-5. (1 being very satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied).

1	2	3	4	5
4%	2%	54%	30%	8%

All 50 people responded. However, 2% of the population surveyed, answered both 2 and 3. This response was not put into the table above. The highest response was 3 at 54%, with somewhat dissatisfied following second with a 30% response.

The final question was "What improvements would you like to see made to Western's current recycling program?" This question was open ended so I received a wide variety of answers. Out of all the surveys, 18% did not provide an answer to this question. The most popular responses were more bins, more signs, better visibility, and more items recycled. Some of the other responses were:

- Using cloth bags in the bookstore
- The cafeteria using less "to go" products and not using Styrofoam
- More accessible containers

- Placing bins by trashcans
- Less paper used on campus
- Bins in classrooms and offices
- Creating more awareness

Interview

I interviewed Western's custodial supervisor Julie Dahl. A copy of the questions is included in Appendix 2. Julie informed me that Western just began their recycling program last spring and that improvements into the program are being addressed. Currently, the containers that are located throughout school have not brought a large reduction in the trash that is collected. A green team consisting of faculty and staff is being formed to address these issues and to come up with solutions that will better the current program. This team will focus on the 3 R's of recycling: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. Western also has found a way to address the reuse part of the 3 R's by donating furniture and other items the school no longer uses. Julie expressed interest in shredding documents rather than taking them to the incinerator to be burned. Shredding would reduce cost to Western for incinerator fees and would help reduce air pollution. Lastly, they will be experimenting with containers in classrooms. Twenty-one classrooms will have bins in them to help determine if it would be beneficial to include the entire school. They have also looked into putting containers outside on campus. The common area between the Kumm Center and the Coleman Center will eventually be redone. Julie stated that they are waiting for those renovations to be complete before outside containers are added.

Conclusion

At Western Technical College, students, faculty, and staff have become more aware of the need to recycle. Of those surveyed, 90% would like to see improvements made to the current recycling program. In order for Western's program to be more effective, more containers and better placement needs to be a requirement. Although 50% of those surveyed thought the locations of the existing containers was convenient, 96% would be more inclined to recycle if containers were in classrooms, offices and outside.

The results of the survey also indicated that more awareness about Western's recycling program would be beneficial. Through the surveys and conversations, it was iterated by many that they were unaware that Western recycled plastic. A contributing factor to this may be that many people aren't aware that La Crosse will recycle plastic.

Better visibility, advertising, and signs are all ways that could help promote the recycling program and make the Western community more aware of where and what we can recycle. Through these efforts, Western can help educate the students, faculty, and staff about the responsibility to recycle.

Western's current recycling program is headed in the right direction and has the opportunity to create a recycling program that promotes environmental sustainability. In creating the green team, Western is proving to the

students, staff, faculty, and the La Crosse community that we are environmentally conscious and that we are interested in creating a greener community.

Works Cited

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