

# RECYCLING MODULE

## What Is Recycling Really?

Recycling is the process of collecting used materials and turning them back into useful products. Recycling diverts valuable materials from the landfill and gives them a second (or third or fourth) life.

Recycling makes a positive contribution to the environment, the economy, and our communities. Recycling and associated manufacturing industries account for around one million U.S. jobs and more than \$100 billion in revenue each year. These jobs range from materials handling and processing to high-quality product manufacturing.

Many people think of recycling as simply a way to dispose of things in a more sustainable way. Recycling certainly reduces waste, but that kind of wishful thinking can sometimes lead people to recycle things that aren't actually recyclable. And that's a big problem. When non-recyclable items are put into recycling bins, recycling becomes much more expensive and more hazardous for the workers. Cutting plastic film away from the machinery at a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), where discards are taken to be sorted and sold, is dangerous work. To be successful, recyclers must produce huge bales of a single type of material - bales of plastic bottles, cardboard, or aluminum, for example - and sell those bales to remanufacturers. Excessive contamination can result in collected recyclables getting sent to a landfill instead of being recycled. To prevent contamination of secondary materials and to protect workers, DO NOT put trash, such as coffee cups, plastic bags, paper towels, and other non-recyclable items into recycling bins. Recycling only functions well when we all recycle right!

Check out the recycling process at the Sonoco Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in Raleigh where UNC's recyclables are taken to be sorted and sold:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HowgOLdv3pk>

## Why Is Recycling Important at UNC?

UNC's Sustainable Carolina zero waste to landfill goal has two parts; reducing the amount of materials we bring onto campus and recovering the rest for recycling or composting. UNC is making progress on both fronts. From FY 2016 to FY 2019, we decreased total waste by 71 pounds per person! In FY 2019, we diverted more than 4,000 tons of materials including bottles, cans, paper, cardboard, compostables, and yard waste from the landfill! These are impressive results and speak to our university's commitment to Sustainable Carolina goals, but we still have a long way to go.

Why do we stress: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, in that order? Because while recycling does save resources and reduces our impact on the environment, it does have some impact. Recycling requires the use of fossil fuels to collect, sort, and transport materials, and even more fossil fuels to remanufacture and deliver those materials back to consumers. All told, this process produces far fewer greenhouse gas

emissions than manufacturing products from virgin materials. But choosing not to purchase an item at all and instead reusing, borrowing, or repairing an existing item, produces virtually no emissions. In addition, recycling is a business and, therefore, costs money. Fortunately, because of the value of secondary materials, collecting and processing recyclables costs only about one-tenth as much as collecting and disposing of trash.

To learn more about how your office can reduce the trash brought to campus in the first place, reuse more, and support the recycling system by buying more recycled content products, check out the [Procurement Module](#).

## What's Recyclable at UNC?

Different municipalities accept different materials for recycling. To make sure your office is recycling the right materials and avoiding the contamination that drives up costs at the Materials Recovery Facility, follow the guidelines from the [UNC Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling \(OWRR\)](#).

### Recycling Best Practices

- 1) Check if the item is recyclable. When in doubt, throw it out!
- 2) Rinse containers and never include liquids or food in or on your recyclables.
- 3) Congratulate yourself for being a waste sorting master.

## How to Make Your Office More Sustainable

**To green your office and complete the Recycling module:**

1. Complete the recycling bin assessment
2. Complete 6 out of 11 recycling tasks
3. Implement a community based social marketing (CBSM) campaign that addresses a specific recycling problem in your office

Education and social norms are extremely influential in individuals' waste disposal choices. It's important to educate your office about what to recycle and how. Lead the charge to foster an environment where properly sorting waste is the norm! And remember, you always have support from the Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling and Sustainable Carolina.

### Recycling Bin Assessment

**Do this before tackling anything else!**

Before you start tackling any recycling tasks, it's important to make sure your recycling bins look good and have the proper signage. The bins should be in spots where the most waste is generated – popular spots are near printers and in break rooms, kitchens, and entryways. Recycling bins should be 'twinned' or placed beside garbage cans and affixed with signs that describe what is recyclable.

The Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling maintains a [database of all indoor recycling locations](#). Check that the recycling bins in your office are where the database says they are. If the bins have been moved to better locations, submit updates to OWRR. If needed, request labels from OWRR.

[Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling](#)  
919-962-1442 | [recycling@facilities.unc.edu](mailto:recycling@facilities.unc.edu)

## Recycling Tasks

**Complete 6 out of the 11 tasks below.**

Task	Resources	Check
Complete a Sustainable Carolina waste sort. Call in Sustainable Carolina to go through your trash bins with you to identify which discards can be recycled or avoided. Also check the recycling bins to make sure people in your office are recycling right.	<a href="#">Sustainable Carolina Contact</a>	
Email your office-mates information on what and how to recycle.	<a href="#">Green Office Cut, Paste, Send - Recycling Guidelines</a>	
Encourage somebody in your office to attend the Recycling Right presentation offered through HR and OWRR.	<a href="#">Courses Offered</a>	
Hang posters about how to recycle at UNC around your office.	<a href="#">OWRR Office Recycling Guide</a>	
Provide everyone with a desk-side recycling bin and instruct them to dump their recyclables into the larger hallway bins when full.  Or encourage your office mates to move more and skip the need for a desk-side bin.	<a href="#">Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling</a> can provide hallway bins, which should always be paired with trash cans. Your office will need to purchase desk-side bins.  <a href="#">For example, Staples Item #: 758215</a>	
Set out and label a small bin for recycling batteries. Contact EHS when this bin is full.	<a href="#">Environment, Health and Safety</a>	

Set out and label a bin to collect plastic film such as grocery bags. Bring the bags to the OWRR when this bin is full.	<a href="#">Plastic Film Recycling at UNC Chapel Hill</a>	
Set out and label a box in your mailroom to collect used, boxed toner cartridges.	<a href="#">Toner Cartridge Collection Sign</a>	
If your office is moving or conducting a clean out, request a large, temporary cart from OWRR.	<a href="#">Request Recycling Services</a>	
Show the video about the Sunoco Materials Recovery Facility in Raleigh at a staff meeting or lunch and learn.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HowgOLdv3pk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HowgOLdv3pk</a>	
Wildcard: Have an idea for another task not listed? Reach out to Sustainable Carolina's Green Office Program to see if it will work!	<a href="#">Sustainable Carolina Contact</a>	
<b>TOTAL</b>		

## Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) Campaign

Identify an ongoing recycling challenge in your office (Seed). Develop a plan to address the challenge (Sprout). Implement a campaign designed to address the challenge (Sapling). Evaluate and assess your next steps (Tree).

[Link to CBSM Word Document](#)

[Link to CBSM Worksheet PDF](#)

## Contacts & Resources

[Sustainable Carolina | Green Office Program](#)

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[Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling](#)

919-962-1442 | [recycling@facilities.unc.edu](mailto:recycling@facilities.unc.edu)

[Environment, Health and Safety](#)

919-962-5507