

Campuses Trending to Uniform Bin Standards

Survey of Higher Ed Waste & Diversion Practices

Busch Systems worked with partner NGOs in 2024 to survey sustainability managers at colleges and universities about bin standardization, centralized waste collection arrangements and other waste diversion best practices. The purpose was to document trends around their adoption, learn where they've been impactful and gather lessons learned in the process. A summary of the responses from over 150 schools, ranging from nationally recognized institutions including Harvard and UC Berkeley to regional schools like UNC Wilmington and Kent State University, can be found in the [full report available online](#).



BIN STANDARDS IMPROVE PARTICIPATION

Research has shown that consistent use of design standards across a campus helps to reduce confusion, improve waste diversion and enhance the aesthetic appearance of waste bins. While each campus applies them differently, bin standards typically incorporate one or more types of guidelines:



Bin Design

Purchasing guidelines to define consistent design specifications and features for bins appropriate for distinct campus settings such as outdoor pathways, indoor public areas, high visibility locations, etc. They may reflect aesthetic, operational/ergonomic, safety or behavior-related best practices



Placement

Guidelines listing general principles and requirements for locating bins along with related site prep in a given setting. They may reflect fire safety, operational or aesthetic priorities, as well as ensure convenient access.



Uniform Signage

Bin labels & signage are designed using a consistent style template, terminology and imagery in all locations.

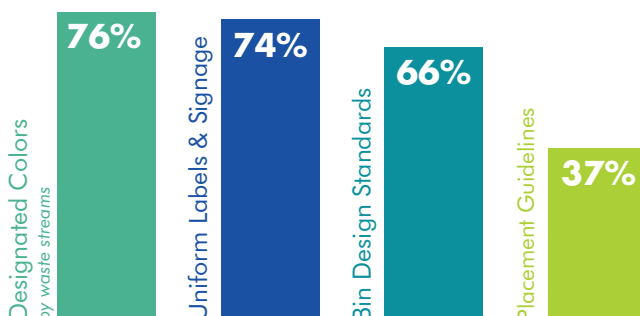


Color Branding

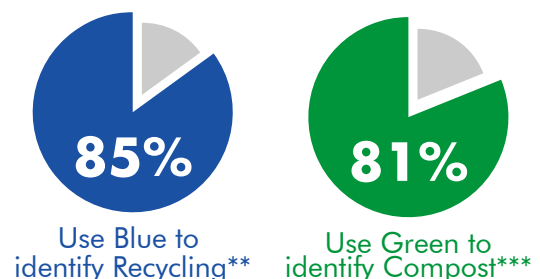
Separate color used to distinguish each collection applied consistently to waste bins & signage in all locations.

SURVEY RESULTS

Percentages of institutions that have adopted guidelines*



Colors to Identify Collection Streams





**SCAN TO SEE
THE FULL REPORT**



LESSONS LEARNED

Participants offered practical advice:

- Inventory the existing infrastructure, mapping which style(s) of bin(s) and waste streams are included in each location.
- Involve stakeholders in designating approved bin styles to ensure their buy-in.
- Beware of form vs function design tradeoffs that can lead to lower diversion & higher contamination.
- Consider modular design and other specs so designated bins are flexible to program changes in the future.
- Arrange for samples of proposed bin styles so collection workers can test their functionality before finalizing a standard.
- Ensure capital projects accurately budget for new bins.
- Create a transition plan for older bins if implementing a new bin standard over time.
- Have a system to replace worn or outdated labels over time.
- Have a process to monitor compliance when stakeholders purchase new bins.

High performing schools (41%+ diversion rate) were 15% more likely to have implemented bin standards than lower diversion schools.



RESOURCES FOR BIN STANDARDS

- Blog reviewing steps to implement bin standards [AC4.1]
- Database of higher ed bin standard guidelines [AC5.1]
- Webinar recording – [AC6.1] University of Michigan case study presentation

*Based on responses from subset of 93 large (10,000+ FTE), US-based schools.

Sample represents 33% of all such institutions. View full report for additional context.

**Specific to schools with mixed recycling/ single stream collections.

***Applies to schools collecting food waste.

