
Bottle ban causes recycling overflow on campus

Bottle ban raises profile of recycling on campus, causes difficulties

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Since the ban on plastic bottle disposal came into effect Oct. 1, questions have been raised about how individuals can incorporate recycling into their regular routines.

The Department of Waste Reduction and Recycling was prepared for the transition, however.

"Being a recycling office, we already are recycling, we have recycling available on campus," Analis Fulghum, the University's education outreach coordinator for Waste Reduction and Recycling, said. "We see this as an opportunity to further engage the campus in recycling, and now that [the ban] is a law, we hope that this law will help create more awareness [and] hopefully get more people involved in [recycling]."

Owing to the ban, the percentage of plastic bottles being recycled on campus has gone up.

"We have seen a 20 percent increase in the number of cans and bottles [being put in recycling bins]," Fulghum said. She attributes this increase to a greater number of recycling pickups, especially from residence halls, which she says are the main recyclers of cans and bottles on campus.

"It's been really nice to get those calls saying 'We're overflowing our [recycling] bins,' " Fulghum said. As a result, the recycling office has had to reorganize its recycling pickup routes to handle the increased numbers of recyclables.

A major concern has been the number of people who dispose of bottles in the trash instead of in recycling bins. Khalil Itani, a senior in biological science, has found it difficult to find conveniently located recycling bins on campus.

"The blue bins, I look for them and I just can't find them when I need them, literally," Itani said. "When I take water bottles out of class, I just can't find [recycling bins] in the general Brickyard area. I put them in my book bag and take them home."

Not all students are as conscientious as Itani, according to Fulghum.

"Before the ban, especially in the walkway areas, we did see some contamination as far as bottles being thrown into the trash cans," Fulghum said.

The recycling office has embarked on an initiative to counter this.

"We're coming up with a five-year plan to be able to stop that by hopefully putting more walkway bins next to trash cans and even reducing the number of trash cans on campus," Fulghum said.

Although more recycling bins are needed across campus, the plan will mostly focus on the availability of walkway bins, as the recycling office said they are a priority.

However, the recent budget cuts have prevented most of the plans from being carried out. The scale of recycling at the University and the limited size of the campus recycling staff also pose difficulties.

"We collect from more than 2,000 bins on campus, and we do most of it in-house with the staff that we have at Waste Reduction and Recycling, and that is composed of about 11 people to collect [recyclables] from the whole campus," Fulghum said. "So as the economy starts getting a little better, I think when we have the available resources we'll be able to implement the plans that we have formulated, basically."

The fact that it is now illegal, not merely incorrect, to dispose of plastic bottles in the trash has resulted in complaints from some students, while others have appreciated the new policy.

"Recycling plastic bottles is a great thing, but I'm not so sure that the law's been approached in the best way by requiring everyone to recycle bottles," Amanda English, a freshman in statistics, said.

Although reactions to the bottle ban have been mixed, the position of the recycling office, according to Fulghum, is that whether students approve of the ban or not, it's the law.

"To us, we try to do what we can to abide by the laws as a University." Residence halls have contacted the recycling office, requesting presentations on the meaning behind the bottle ban.

"They are concerned, and they do want students to realize that this [ban] is a law and to answer any questions they might have, so we do offer this as a service," Fulghum said.

Fulghum said overall the University would like more information regarding the ban. "I do see that as a benefit; it's a law, and whether you like it or not, it's producing questions that maybe students weren't thinking of before, and our office will always be a resource to help answer those questions," Fulghum said.

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