



How to Set Up a School Recycling Program

Including resources on contracting, and bins.

Recycling has been mandatory in Connecticut for a number of items since January 1, 1991, and additional materials were added in 2012. Schools are not exempt from these laws. Review [CT Mandatory Recycling](#) in accordance with Section 22a-208v and 22a-256a of the Connecticut General Statutes to learn more about items required to be collecting for recycling in Connecticut. In 2011, Connecticut passed a Commercial Organics Recycling Law and beginning 2026 schools meeting certain criteria will have to comply with this law.

To learn more about how your school can comply with Connecticut's Commercial Organics Recycling law, return to [main School Recycling page](#) and look for *How to Manage Surplus Food and Divert Food Scraps for Composting/Anaerobic Digestion* in the Tool Kit.

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How to Start a School Recycling Program

Whether you're thinking about your individual school, or at a district level, each school may have its own specific needs or approach to collect materials for recycling and/or composting. And while you may save money with strong negotiations with your trash, recycling and food scrap contracts, it's important to recognize recycling in your school(s) also models good behavior that helps young people see the value of protecting the environment, conserving resources and also complying with the law.

Schools and/or districts are encouraged to [Form a Green Team](#), to work with staff from different parts of the school.

Districts/Boards of Education: It is important to understand the roles of custodial staff and teachers, including their current duties, including union contracts, when making changes to school procedures or work duties. Large-scale purchasing of collection containers or other equipment at the district level could save time and money. There is efficiency of scale to integrate recycling and food scraps collection into the school operations at the district level. Additionally, consider how you can incorporate waste reduction and reuse into your sustainable materials management plans, which may off-set costs.



Working at the district level can provide a number of important benefits:

- Ability to negotiate better contracts
- Provides consistency throughout students' academic careers
- Increases efficiency of a school's recycling and/or food scrap collection program
- Encourages recycling, composting, and trash contracts through competition
- Provides opportunities for environmental education
- Utilizes increased purchasing power; take advantage of [state contracts](#) with The CT Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

For School Business Officials: As a school business official, you may be responsible for negotiating waste management contracts that include trash, recycling, food scraps and food recovery for your school district or campus.

When you contract with a waste hauler, they are responsible for picking up your materials outside the school, but it is up to you and your maintenance and facility staff to collect materials from inside the building, which includes needing a budget for bins inside the school.

This is likely the same collecting food scraps, but if you're working with a food recovery organization, they may need access to the school kitchen. Learn more [here \(LINK TO ORGANICS PDF\)](#) about donating surplus food.

Forming a Green Team

Why a Green Team? Green teams bring together staff from all parts of a school to brainstorm, plan and carry out projects that further the sustainability goals of the school. A Green Team can identify challenges and opportunities for improving waste management practices and addressing other environmental impacts related to students, staff, school buildings and its grounds. Green Teams are about continuous improvement.

[Green Schools Initiative: Tips for Starting Your Green Team](#)

Waste, Recycling and Food Scrap Contracts

The power and control over services and costs, as well as cost savings are within the contract with your local waste and recycling hauler(s). Trash disposal and recycling are often collected by the same hauler, but with two separate trucks, collecting from two separate dumpsters. It is against the law to commingle recyclables with trash – not only for the hauler, but within your school buildings and grounds too.



Contracts for waste, recycling and food scraps, like other types of contracts have room for negotiation. School waste contracts are either incorporated into your municipality's waste contract or negotiated using a private hauler by your school business officials.

Determine how your school's waste is currently handled and what your hauler has been contracted to collect. If recycling is not included in your waste contract, you must add recycling services to your contract. Waste haulers are required to offer recycling

collection services in addition to trash collection. If your current hauler refuses, find a new hauler and/or reach out to CT DEEP 888-424-4193 to file a formal complaint.

Resource Management Contracts: Partner with your Hauler(s)

Waste contracts typically compensate haulers based on the volume of waste handled. On the other hand, customers have an incentive to decrease their volumes of waste to reduce the fees they pay. These competing incentive structures often impede progress towards source reduction.

Resource Management Contracting (RMC), increasing waste diversion through strategic contracting, is an alternative way of negotiating a contract that allows the financial prize to be shared by both the waste generator and the waste hauler. RMC takes a holistic approach towards waste management and looks at waste and recycling as one resource that should be properly managed. RMC contracts also offer the customer the assurance that their waste is being sent to the location with the most resource recovery potential. Please visit DEEP's [Resource Management Contracting](#) webpage or RecyclingWorks Massachusetts' webpage on [Resource Management Contracting for Waste Services](#) for more information.

Dumpsters and Bins: Number, Size and Placement

Bin placement and quantity are essential to the effectiveness of your recycling program. Consider what type of bin, or bins you need inside the school building.

Connecticut's Mixed Recycling (single stream) program accepts plastic, metal and glass containers and paper such as newsprint, white and colored office paper, flyers, posters and cardboard all in the same container. Review [What's IN](#), [What's OUT](#).

To determine how many and the types of collection bins needed in your school, look to where you currently have trash cans. Where is trash and/or recyclables typically generated. All trash bins should be paired with a recycling bin. This includes if you have trash cans in classrooms, staff lounges, and common spaces, such as hallways, the library, and cafeteria.

The cafeteria, kitchen, staff lounge and culinary classrooms will also need a food scraps (collection) recycling bin.

Suggested locations for bins and materials generated:

Offices – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables;

Teacher Lounges – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps;

Classrooms – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps if snacks are served in the classroom;

Library – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables;

Cafeteria Waste ([LINK to another section](#)) – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps, bin for liquids, area to stack trays, area for washable utensils, consider collection for food donation if there is excess food;

Culinary Classrooms ([LINK to another section](#)) – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps, consider collection for food donation if there is excess food;

Outdoor Gym – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps if food is consumed in the area; and

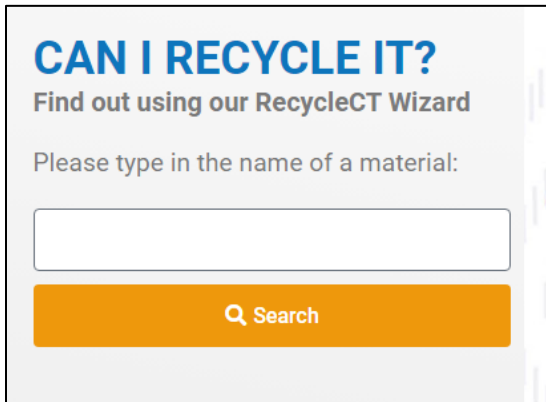
Playground and Sport Fields – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps if is food consumed in the area.

How Will the Recyclables be Collected and Stored? Include provisions for [collection containers](#) in your waste, recycling and/or food scraps hauling contract(s). If that can't be negotiated, then the school will need to [purchase](#) containers themselves. The size and quantity of indoor and outdoor containers will be dependent on the size of your school and the provisions in your contract.

Where to Get Bins to Collect Trash, Recyclables or Food Scraps?



Any janitorial supply company will have a range of trash, recycling and possibly food scrap bins, including some with wheels. You may save money if you purchase through a DAS state contract. There's also a [list of recycling collection container \(bin\) manufacturers](#) on DEEP's website with links to each company. Five-gallon buckets could also be an easy DIY approach – either purchasing new ones at local hardware or home improvement stores, or by collecting them from the community. Check out some fundraising opportunities here ([LINK](#)) too.



The image shows a web-based search interface titled "CAN I RECYCLE IT?". Below the title is the text "Find out using our RecycleCT Wizard". A prompt asks the user to "Please type in the name of a material:" followed by a text input field. Below the input field is an orange button with a magnifying glass icon and the word "Search".

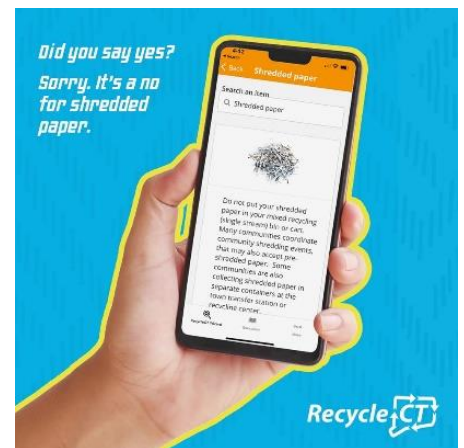
Are You Collecting the Right Materials in Your Mixed Recycling (Single Stream) Bins?

Connecticut has one list of What's IN and What's OUT (WIWO) across the entire state. This makes it easier to understand what goes in CT's mixed recycling (single stream) program regardless of where you live or where you go to schools. Check out this [video What's IN, What's OUT: CT Harmonizes Recycling Across the State.](#)

To ensure you're Recycling Right, refer to both the [What's IN, What's OUT](#) site, which has flyers and posters, and the RecycleCT Wizard, a search tool where materials can be verified if they are accepted in CT's mixed recycling program.

Did you know, your school can put the RecycleCT Wizard on the school website? Just reach out to [Sherill Baldwin](#) at CT DEEP to learn how.

RecycleCT also has a RecycleCT Wizard App, which can be downloaded via Google or Apple. The App can be used to look up certain items and will verify if the material you are uncertain about is accepted in the mixed recycling bin, or best in the trash can or other recycling program.



Who Will be Responsible for Running the Program?

It is important to make sure someone at the school is in charge of monitoring all parts of your recycling and composting program. This person should be the primary contact for the school community, addressing any questions or concerns regarding the program. If you're the superintendent or on the school board, consider requiring that each school appoint a recycling contact who will report directly to the Principal with any issues the school may encounter.

Where Do Recyclables Go?

Connecticut has many Material Recovery Facilities (MRF), that process and sort our recyclables. Check out this [video](#) made by the Town of Mansfield, [What Happens to My Recyclables?](#) It's important to understand, MRFs only want recyclables that are acceptable in CT's Mixed Recycling (single stream) program, outlined by the [What's IN, What's OUT](#) list and should be free from trash and other contaminants.

MRF operators separate your mixed recyclables into saleable categories; raw commodities include old corrugated cardboard (OCC), mixed paper (which may or may not include milk cartons and juice boxes), milk cartons and juice boxes (if marketed separately), plastic containers, aluminum cans,

steel cans and glass bottles and jars. These commodities are then baled up and sold to end-markets that then make new products from these materials. Check out this fun video, [Recycling Magic](#), to learn what items are made from recycled commodities.

Your school may collect other materials for recycling, each having specific markets. For example, textiles are sold to textile markets, plastic bags and film are managed by plastic film markets, food scraps are managed by compost haulers and processors etc. Return to the main page to learn about additional items you might consider collecting at your school for recycling.

My Hauler Said I Can Mix My Recyclables with My Trash and they Pull Out Recyclables

Sometimes haulers and collectors in Connecticut are not aware of current rules, regulations and laws. Know that recyclables **must** be sorted and collected separately from trash, it is the law. If a hauler mixes sorted recyclables with trash they are breaking the law. If this is happening, it's time to contract with a new hauler.

[Recyclables must be collected separately from trash.](#)