

Best Practices for Container Setup

These guidelines for the proper set-up of Recycle, Compost and Landfill (trash) collection containers are based on best practices and apply to any public space. Properly installed containers will lead to a better public experience, greater efficiency for custodial staff, and improved recycling rates for your community.

Twinned Containers

Placing landfill and recycling (and compost) containers side by side, or “twinning the bin,” ensures it’s as easy for users to recycle an item as it is to throw it away. When placed apart, people will typically use whichever container is most convenient, leading to lost recycling opportunities or contaminated recycling.

Consistent, Identifiable Colors

Consistency is important in recycling education, especially when it comes to color. In the solid waste industry, color branding uses blue for Recycle, green for Compost, and black or gray for Landfill.

Proper Signage

Signage and labels should be easy to read and placed at eye level whenever possible. Use uncluttered images and simple, concise descriptions, such as “paper & cardboard,” of what can and cannot be placed in each container. In the locations where your containers will be placed, identify the most commonly discarded items and prioritize their depictions in your signage.



To make your own customized signs using SWACO’s free sign maker tool, scan the QR code or visit: RecycleRight.org/signmaker

Unique Openings

The size and shape of a container opening can be used to restrict what’s collected for recycling and composting and create visual cues about what is and is not accepted. To determine which opening type to use, it’s important to assess the types of materials that will be most frequently discarded in an area. Use a circular opening for bottles and cans and a Saturn shape when bottles, cans and paper are accepted.

Right-Sized Containers

One size does not fit all when it comes to paired containers. It may be necessary to use different sized containers in the same location. For instance, large sets of containers may work in an open area, while narrow sets may be needed along a short wall.

Clear, Black, & Compostable Bags

If bags are used to line the inside of containers, use clear bags for recycling, black bags for landfill, and compostable (BPI certified) bags for compost to provide custodial staff an easy way to distinguish among them when tossing into carts or emptying into dumpsters.



Use consistent colors:

- Blue for Recycle
- Green for Compost
- Black/Gray for Landfill



Paper, Plastic & Aluminum Cups

Use uncluttered images and simple descriptions in signage



Use circular or Saturn openings for recycling lids