



Sustain CMU: Improving Signage on Waste Disposal

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The Problem

CMU is investing more and more into sustainable waste management, such as making their dining materials almost 100% compostable.

However, recycling and compost bins at CMU see **high levels of contamination**, and we have found that **many students are unsure about how to sort their waste**.

Our Solution

Sustain CMU is tackling this issue by designing new recycling and composting signage.

We plan to put up two different types of posters: the usual **informational posters** that serve as a reference at the waste bins, as well as a set of **"surprising facts" posters** that target common misconceptions (shown to the right). So far, we've only prototyped the latter, which are now up around campus.

Our Objectives/ Goals

1. Educate the student body on the proper waste disposal methods in Pittsburgh.
2. Catch people's attention with our posters to read about waste disposal and retain the information they learned.
3. See an impact; for example, currently 80% of what is thrown in the garbage at CMU could have been composted instead.

Prototype 1:
Where would people notice our signage?

Location	Yes	Maybe	No
Inside an elevator	~8	~3	~5
In a restroom stall/restroom	~7	~2	~3
In line at a dining location	~3	~2	~3
A wall near a dining location	~2	~2	~3
Around waste bins	~4	~1	~1
Near the gym	~1	~1	~1
On a dining area table	~1	~1	~1

Prototype 2:
How can we get people to notice the information?

- YOU CAN'T RECYCLE SOLO CUPS IN PGH?!** (Sorry, PH-DENT)
- Which of these do you think are recyclable in Pittsburgh?** (None, even if they are clean.)
- YOU CAN'T RECYCLE BOTTLE CAPS IN PGH?!** (throw away the cap, recycle the bottle!)
- when in doubt, throw it out.** (food in the recycle bins will cause the whole bag of recycling to be thrown out.)
- 1 scan = 1 pet** (did you notice this poster? let us know! Sustain CMU wants to find the best locations for informational posters about waste.)
- 80% of what is thrown in the trash at CMU could have been composted instead.** (Recyclable varies from city to city.)
- THE FUTURE IS NOW!** (toss 'em into the right bin! these are compostable in CMU)

We put up surprising fact posters and found that students liked and noticed posters that had jokes relevant to the school.

Challenges

1. Students are not familiar with composting rules
 2. Throwing away waste is typically on the go
 3. CMU dining services may not be able to get compostable utensils and containers due to supply issues
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1. How can we make composting the norm at CMU?
 2. How do we get people to think as they throw away waste?
 3. How do we present ambiguities of what is compostable in an easily interpretable format?

Next Steps

1. Test posters at CMU dining locations
2. Interviewing students to understand how they best retain information
3. Put up posters at appropriate locations
4. Document any changes in waste disposal stats

Student Responses

1. "In the bathroom I'm forced to read the poster, so that seems to be effective."
2. "Locate at points where trash is disposed of, and where people tend to congregate to study and exit the study locations."
3. "Information where you dispose of waste — and having all types of collection bins near each other — is probably best!"
4. "There should be a website that is clear about how to dispose of waste."