

Transcript: Green Leek: Recycling at UNCG – Introduction

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Presented by: Beth Filar Williams and Ben Kunka

Beth: Hi, I'm sitting here with Ben Kunka, who is the recycling program

manager for the Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling, and he was kind enough

to answer a few questions and talk a little bit about what they do here

at OWRR, and show us some things around the campus that are related to recycling.

So to begin with I'm going to let him introduce a little bit about OWRR and

what they do, and then I'm going to launch into some questions.

Ben: Alright. Yeah, I'm Ben Kunka, and I'm with the Office of Waste Reduction

and Recycling, and what we do here on campus is basically manage the solid

waste, which includes the trash disposal and the recycling aspects on campus.

We are a five person department. We have four people out in the field in

trucks and golf carts, and a variety of vehicles that you'll see later on, and

then I'm in charge of basically the office. I do the budgetary things, the policy things

and the education, and so it's an exciting place to be. Every aspect of campus

produces some kind of waste, so I get to

interact with a large variety of people

around campus. Um, And so it's an exciting place to work. I also have a large, um,

contract with the waste hauler, that is, our big dumpsters on campus, so I manage

that contract. But, um, it's a small department, but we do a lot here on

campus, and without it we wouldn't be able to have our campus be fully

operational.

Beth: Well, I'd love to hear a little bit more about how much money, you know,

how much recycling we do each year and how much money maybe that generates,

or we're saving. Do you have any stats on that?

Ben: Yeah. Right now we're around 37% recycling rate. Last year, last fiscal

year, from June to July 2010-2011, we generated a little over 2,000 tons of

waste. And 762 tons of that was recycled, reused, or composted.

Beth: Wow.

Ben: So, um, we have a long ways to go still, but 37% is still nothing to

sneeze at. The OWRRs been around since the early nineties. It was started by

students as a volunteer effort, and has since grown into the department

that we are today. Um, this last year

we saved about \$192,000 due to recycling

and reuse efforts on campus. So I'd like to argue that one of our reasons

for existence is that we more than make up for our departments salaries, um,

with the cost savings that we give the university.

Beth: Definately, and imagine if you could up that 37%, how much money we could save.

Ben: It's substantial and, um, it's really not up so much to people like

myself that run the department or my crew, it's really up to the people on

campus.

Beth: Definately.

Ben: Our success is dependent on you the user using our bins correctly and,

um, so hopefully you'll learn a little bit about how you can do that more

properly, and what clarifications are on some of the tricky things.

Beth: Great, definately.

Ben: Cool.

Beth: Alright, well, let me just ask a couple of questions. These were

generated from the library, Jackson Library staff. we asked them what

questions they might have related to

recycling. And it does seem like a

number of them have to do with plastics.

Um, for example, is there anywhere on

campus or in Greensboro that takes the
number 5 plastics, like yogurt containers,

um, and asking questions about rigid
plastics. Um, and they again about

recycling, like taking the caps off
when you through those away, as well as,

other things like, um, number 1 and 2
plastics go in regular recycling at

home and here. Um, what about the 4s and
5s? So it seems like there is a lot of

questions related to the different kinds
of plastics and recycling those, and the

shapes of plastics. Maybe you could talk
about that a little bit.

Ben: Yeah, the bulk of the plastics that
we recycle here on campus are with our

commingled recycling program. Commingled
recycling is the bread and butter of our

recycling program. That's where most of
our tons are, and basically our program

is a mirror of the City of Greensboro's
recycling program. So if you live here

in the city of Greensboro we have the
exact same facility that we drop our

stuff off to. It's actually a cost neutral
agreement we have with them, so that's

where we get a lot of our avoidant cost,
is not paying a tipping fee for that.

But going into plastics, um, just to back up a little bit, every recycling

operation is a little different across the country. Some people are from up

north where they can take all different kinds of plastics, 1-7. It all depends

on the market. Um, the market dictates what that recycling facility can accept.

Um, so here in the City of Greensboro they decided only to collect numbers 1

and 2 plastics primarily. And another way of, um, instead of looking at the little

number on the bottom of these bottles or containers, you can look at the opening

of the container, and if the opening is smaller than the body of the container,

then chances are it's a 1 or 2 plastic.

Beth: OK

Ben: And, um, so there is limitations. If you see another number other than 1

or 2, um, you need to check it a little bit further, and chances are it's probably

gonna need to be trash, sadly. That is some bad news for those people that enjoy

yogurt on a regular basis. Um, those yogurt containers usually are not

recyclable here. Um, plastic cups from, like, um, the Starbucks, those are not

recyclable. Going back to that shape of the neck to the body, um, so it's again

based on markets. I would love to tell everybody that we could recycle all those

and our numbers would skyrocket if we could, but, um, my job here on campus is to give,

um, is to give these facilities the correct materials, um, so we can continue to enjoy

that cost-neutral relationship with the City of Greensboro. Um, rigid plastics is

another kind of ambiguous, um, thing that the City of Greensboro does collect, and

what I like to think of as rigid plastics are, like, those little toys that you see

on playgrounds that are all those solid colored plastics. Laundry basics, the

5-gallon buckets, um, those little nursery tray containers, those black containers

that, um, hold multiple flowers or herbs. Those containers are rigid plastics. Um,

and the City of Greensboro does have a website that goes into greater detail

about what exactly is a rigid plastic. But is it, plastics are our most confusing

item here to recycle on campus. Um, so when in doubt call and find out, um, call my

office if you have a question, um, it is, there's a lot of different plastics

out there, and, um, a lot of people enjoy lots of products packaged in plastic. So

if you have a question I encourage people to come see me. Um, is there anything

I missed with the plastics?

Beth: Um, I think that covers the plastics.
I guess I would say in summary, so ones and

twos are the ones that are the lid, um, the
opening is smaller than the rest of it. So,

maybe think of about that when people, um,
people should think about that when they're

purchasing things, maybe they can find
things that are, go with something that

they can either reuse that plastic container
for something, or, um, or if you know

people up in the Northeast like I do, you
save all your fives and you take them up

and recycle them at your parents house.

Ben: I'm glad you mentioned that. Um, Office
waster Reduction and Recycling, that name

is intentional. Um, we are not the recycling
office, which is really tempting to call us

that. We do handle the trash, but in
addition we also encourage waste reduction.

Waste Reduction is far superior to any
kind of recycling that you can do, so it

all comes down to individual purchasing,
decisions. So if you can buy things

that you know are recyclable, then you're
doing a heck of a lot better job than

buying whatevers, um, you feel like
buying, and then worrying about the

recycling afterwards. Try to think about
the whole cycle. So, um, the purchasing

decisions that each and every person makes on campus, um, effects, what, um,

the waste that we produce.

Beth: That's a great point. Um, alright.

Ben: I will say, too, about the bottle caps, um, bottle caps, we do encourage

people to take off caps, and remove them and put them in the trash. And we do

encourage people to rinse out the containers, and empty to contents of

those beverage containers. Um, it's not the end of the world if the cap is left

on, or there's a little bit of Coke or water left in that bottle. Um, they can

still recycle it. It won't contaminate the entire load, and force the whole

load to be trashed. But that is the ideal, um, is to remove the caps.

One of the main reasons they want us to do that, is when plastic is then

separated out at the facility, it's condensed into a big cube. And when

you condense those plastic bottles with caps on, it's like a shotgun going off.

The air pressure shoots that cap off, so it's a safety issue, and a lot of times

those caps are made of a different kind of plastic. So, um, in marketing recyclables

you want to have a nice homogenous, um, collection of whatever it is, in

this case plastic, and when you start introducing different kinds of plastics

that value of that bale goes down. So they're trying to maximize the value,

and when you maximize the value you maximize the recyclability of that item.

Beth: Good point. Good point. So, take the time to take off your plastic

caps, and empty your containers out, but don't worry if it's, if you haven't done

that, or you see some in there it's not the end of the world. But try to get

into the habit of it. Great.