

Trash the Current Plan

Lack of resources, not support, hamper UTD recycling



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During the past few months, the residents of Phase 8 (or at least, of buildings 53-58) became accustomed to easy-access recycling: On the ground floor of each building, in the nook beside both stairwells, there were two cardboard receptacles, one on either side of the building.

A sign on each read, "RecycleMania," and explained not only what could and could not be recycled within, but also the nature of its presence.

Sustenants, a student-driven organization on campus that supports environmental activism and sustainable development, lobbied for the receptacles so that UTD could participate in the nationwide "RecycleMania" competition, which (according to its website, recyclemania.com) uses university-submitted data to measure which universities collect "the largest amount of recyclables per capita, the largest amount of total recyclables, the least amount of trash per capita, or have the highest recycling rate."

Out of more than 510 participating schools, UTD placed sixth in the amount of paper it recycled; of a total of 23.63 cumulative recycleable pounds per person recycled here during the competition, a whopping 20.62 cumulative recycleable pounds were paper.

The total includes recycling placed in compactors and offices as well as in the bins, the bins themselves were integral to achieving the true RecycleMania purpose: augmenting (rather than simply counting) recycling. Yet, despite the rousing success the bins had, UTD still has many obstacles on the path to true change in recycling.

Although Bron Clayton, the Building Services Supervisor, worked tirelessly to secure 100 of the receptacles, and Matthew Grief and Chris Coleman

of Reslife trustingly and generously granted permission for the bins deployment, there was only enough manpower for 12 to be installed (and even those put a strain on the diligent Facilities Management staff).

In addition, Sustenants had to promise to keep those bins only for the 10-week duration of the competition because of the concerns about emptying them. Some students, however, believe there is enough interest to keep the bins as a viable option.

"The receptacles were still emptied in a timely enough manner to classify them as an improvement to the landscape, and the fact that they were constantly full proves that students are ready to incorporate recycling as a basic part of the waste management system," according to Alison Beatty, founder of Sustenants and unrivaled tree-hugger.

Furthermore, she noted, the contamination rate of the recyclables was almost zero: there was no reckless or irresponsible recycling of non-recyclable items.

But, alas, as per the initial promise, the receptacles, though well-used and oft full, could not stay forever, an unfortunate detriment to having students recycle.

While environmentalists sometimes hesitate to admit it, recycling is often a matter of convenience; when students have to walk in one direction for waste (necessary) and another for recycling (arguably optional), plastic milk jugs and old newspapers tend to make their way into the trash bin.

When every student living on campus has ready access to a personal kitchen but not-quite-so-ready access to a recycling bin, that sad fact is especially true.

It was hoped that the competition would encourage environmentally friendly behavior and an awareness of the amount of recyclable waste each apartment produces. The proof that it has lies in the fact that students

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are noticing the bins' absence — and complaining. There have even been proposals to the Alumni Fund for plastic receptacles, which are more resilient in bad weather, to replace the less resilient, temporary cardboard ones.

"People come to me with great ideas all the time about where more receptacles should be placed and the only thing holding us back is that Facilities really just doesn't have the manpower to collect it all. This situation will probably worsen when the new dorms, cafeteria, etc. all open up next year," Beatty said.

With that new building on its way, there are only two possible options: a new recycling and waste management strategy or an even more overworked Facilities Management team. Of the two, change, in the form of increased staffing or better equipment or a new routine, seems more likely.

Therefore, if there is such a thing as perfect time to push for the reinstatement of the RecycleMania bins (or something similar), that time is now.

Facilities Management and Residential Life are in the process of re-evaluating and modifying the current system. Informing them of the student body's desire for increased recycling access will allow them to assess the necessary manpower and incorporate it into their new plan.

For the interested, there are plenty of other environmentally friendly movements and activities that have taken place or are shaping up around campus:

Students for Environmental Awareness had an Earth Day booth on April 22; Josef Velten, the president of the Renewable Energy Club, is looking for brazen mathematicians and engineers to help him design and build a windmill to provide clean wind energy to a building on campus; Sustenants is beginning the bold task of neutralizing UTD's environmental footprint.

For the minimalist, there is always tomorrow's trash to be sorted, and a short walk to the recycling compactor to be made. ■

Lindsay Bernsen has a fever, and the only prescription is more recycling. Discuss this article at amp.utdallas.edu!