

# Milk Carton Recycling

Milk carton recycling is most appropriate for schools that already have a successful recycling program in place and are ready to take the next step in reducing their waste.

Milk carton recycling can be a challenge, especially for schools with a large student population. However, with the proper system in place, schools may see a significant reduction in the amount of garbage being collected.

The most important barrier in milk carton recycling is milk contamination. Milk remaining in the cartons and collection bags attracts pests and promotes the growth of mold and bacteria which derail the recycling process. The inclusion of milk-contaminated cartons forces garbage haulers to throw out entire loads of recyclable materials.

Below is a proposed collection system for school cafeterias interested in recycling milk cartons.

**Step 1- Contact your garbage hauler** and let them know you are interested in collecting milk cartons for recycling. Not all garbage haulers are able to accept school milk cartons for recycling. Garbage haulers take their recyclable materials to different recycling depots and not all depots accept school milk cartons for recycling.

School or district facilities staff should be able to assist you in contacting your garbage hauler. If your hauler accepts milk cartons for recycling, heed any precautions or advice they offer. If your hauler is not able to accept milk cartons you may not be able to recycle milk cartons at your school.

**Step 2- Create a single waste station** in your cafeteria that collects all materials. The waste station may include; trash, bottles and cans, food waste for compost, liquid waste and any durable cutlery or trays. A single waste station simplifies student sorting by collecting all materials in the same area.



**Step 3– Capture liquid waste in a bucket at your waste station.** Open the top of the milk carton completely. Students must dispose of as much liquid from their milk cartons as possible.



**Step 4- Allow cartons to dry.** Acquire a rack or crates to hold upside-down milk cartons while they dry. The drying racks should be located in or near the waste station. Providing enough space for the number of milk cartons collected can be a challenge. One advantage to collecting the cartons in crates is that when full, they can be moved out of the waste station, to another location to dry, and replaced by empty crates.

**Tip:** place the rack or crates inside of a tub to capture excess liquid from the drying cartons.



**Step 5- Label and bag your cartons.** When dry, milk cartons should be placed in a clear plastic bag that is labeled with the school's name and phone number. Then place the bag in the recycling container provided by your hauler with other recyclable materials your school captures.

**Keep in mind:**

- Students and staff need to be properly educated about your new collection system.
- Announcements and reminders are always helpful.
- In addition to providing signage above bins, waste stations should be monitored.